

The Young LEWIS CARROLL

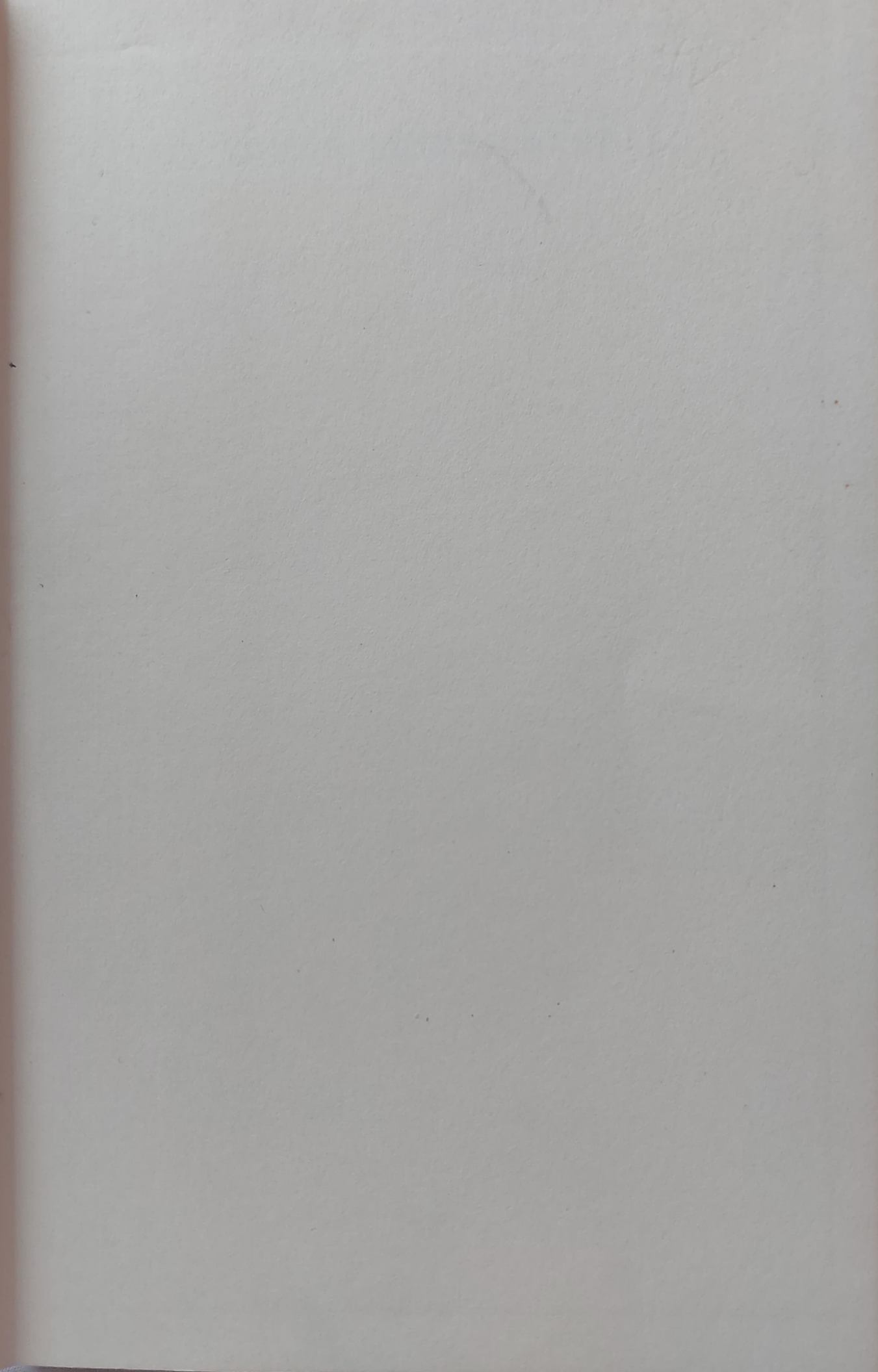


Joanna Richardson

There never was a boy like Charles Dodgson for inventing things. Whether it was a new game, or a story, or just the relating of an alleged conversation between two of the garden flowers, he kept his large family of brothers and sisters endlessly amused. As he himself said, there was so much to be invented. And sometimes his nonsense sounded so sensible that one forgot it was nonsense at all.

Luckily for us, Charles went on inventing and talking nonsense all his life, and just how good at it he was we know from *Alice in Wonderland* and the other marvellous tales he wrote for his young friends under the name of Lewis Carroll. In her first contribution to the *Famous Childhoods* series, Joanna Richardson vividly recaptures the atmosphere of the Yorkshire vicarage where he spent the greater part of his childhood, and the fascination which already at that time his tales had for all his hearers.

*For complete list of
titles see back flap*



THE YOUNG LEWIS CARROLL

The Young Lewis Carroll

JOANNA RICHARDSON

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*For my nephew Simon
with much love*

The author is grateful for the help she obtained from Derek Hudson's *Lewis Carroll* (Constable, 1954), and from *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll*, edited by Roger Lancelyn Green (Cassell, 1953).



I

1837: Five Years Old

One sultry day towards the end of June, 1837, a young clergyman, the Reverend Charles Dodgson, might have been observed cantering briskly on a cob from Warrington, in Lancashire, to his parish of Daresbury, across the Cheshire border on the main Chester road. He took a hand off the reins a moment, to ruffle his curly hair and loosen the high white stock round his neck. The seven miles

seemed long to him, and he was hot with haste, for he had exciting news to take home.

At last, through a gap in the oak trees, across the wide cornfields, he caught sight of Daresbury Parsonage. It looked like a doll's house: a square little red brick house with a window on either side of the trellised front door, and three windows on top. How peaceful and secluded it seemed! But the country silence would not last for long. The news that he was bringing would soon set the little village all astir, as it had stirred excitement throughout the country.

*

Mr Dodgson jumped off his cob, tethered it to a post, and hastened into the garden. His wife was sitting on a bench under the broad branches of an oak tree; a breeze was gently stirring the tiers of frills on her tall white cap, and blowing the muslin fichu round her neck. She was telling a story. The children sat in a circle round her. The serious girl in the dark blue dress, embroidering a sampler, was the eldest of the family, Frances Jane, aged eleven; the fair-haired, mischievous girl in green was Elizabeth Lucy, aged nine; next, in a patched and handed-down dress, came the tomboyish, tousled Caroline; and beside her, patiently picking the petals off a daisy-chain, was plump little Mary Charlotte. Skeffington, the baby, was asleep upstairs in the nursery. On Mrs Dodgson's lap, as usual, sat her elder son, a dark-haired, blue-eyed boy in a tunic with a broad white collar. He was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, aged five and a half.

'Mama is telling us the most delightful tale!' cried Charles. His eyes were shining with excitement. 'It is all about squirrels and toads and rabbits.'

'You must have done well at your lessons, then,' said his father, smiling. 'I know that Mama only tells these stories to children who apply themselves to their work.'

Mrs Dodgson glanced up at her husband. 'You are right, my love. Pleasure is the reward of application. But Charles has so excelled himself at his mathematics, that I promised to tell him a tale. And when it is over, I have promised the children they can pick a dish of strawberries from the kitchen garden.'

'It is certainly a day to remember,' said Mr Dodgson, solemnly. 'I have important news to tell you all. King William the Fourth died at Windsor two days ago, and we have a new Queen reigning over us.'

'Queen Victoria!' exclaimed his wife. 'Why, she is only a few years older than Fanny!'

'Yes, my love, she is only eighteen. But they say she is wise beyond her years. I think she will be a good Queen. I believe that she is pious and dutiful. God be thanked that she is now our Sovereign.'

'What are pious and dutiful, Papa?' asked Charles. He had never heard the words before.

Mr Dodgson sat down beside his wife.

'Piety,' he explained, 'means being true to religion. It means behaving like a Christian.'

'Like you, Papa?'

Mr Dodgson smiled. 'I try to set an example of Christian behaviour. My family, Charlie – your family – have always tried to do that.'

'Your great-great-grandfather was a vicar, Charlie,' Mrs Dodgson said, 'away in Yorkshire a hundred years ago.'

'And his son was called Charles, just like you,' the parson continued. 'He became a Bishop – the Bishop of Ossory and Ferns, and then the Bishop of Elphin.'

'Was *his* son a bishop, too?'

Mr. Dodgson shook his head. 'My father was a soldier. He was a captain in the 4th Dragoon Guards. I can still remember his scarlet tunic, with the thick gold epaulettes and braid, but I was too young to know him properly. He was killed by the rebels in Ireland, when I was a boy of three. But he was a brave soldier, Charles, he did his duty to his King and Country. You must learn to be good like the Bishop, and brave like grandpapa.'

'Must I learn to be clever, too?'

Mrs Dodgson looked at her husband.

'You must learn to do well at your work,' she answered, 'like your father in the Church. And like your uncle Hassard, at the law.'

'What's the law?'

'Charlie, darling, don't ask so many questions. Don't you see that poor Papa is hot and tired, after his ride?'

Mr Dodgson took a white lawn handkerchief out of his breast pocket, and dabbed his forehead.

'It is certainly warm,' he said. 'But I will answer one more question. The law is the set of rules that tells everyone in England what is right and what is wrong. The law is there, Charlie, to make sure that bad men are punished, and good men are protected. Uncle Hassard is a barrister, that means he defends the good people in court, and explains how the bad ones are doing wrong.'

The church clock struck. He rose to his feet, and brushed the thick grey dust off his gaiters.

'Well, Frances, my dear, I must leave you to finish your exciting tale. It is five o'clock, and I must prepare the next lesson for my pupils.'

*

Ten years ago, Mr Dodgson's old college, Christ Church,

at Oxford, had made him the curate of Newton Daresbury; but while a young bachelor might have found the living enough to support him, Mr Dodgson had soon married his sweet and gentle cousin, Miss Lutwidge. And Frances Jane had given him two daughters, then a son, then two more daughters, then another son; and it was hard for a parson to support so large a family. And so Mr Dodgson gave lessons in divinity, Greek and Latin and mathematics.

Charles had once asked to go to a lesson; he had watched his father draw strange shapes in a notebook, and explain them. They were called squares and triangles and parallelograms, Mr Dodgson said, and he had added up their sides and done sums and puzzles with them. Charles had tried hard to understand what the lessons meant; he had tried so hard he felt his head would burst. But his father had told him, very kindly, that he must be grown-up to understand. After that, Charles had always eaten all his meat and vegetables (even turnips, which he hated) to the last scrap, because meat and vegetables are the things that make you grow up fast.

And often, when his father was working on a sermon for the following Sunday, or preparing lessons for Sunday school, Charles would tiptoe into the little study. He would sit down on a high stool by the green-baize covered table where Mr. Dodgson sometimes piled his books. And he would try to be grown-up and draw parallelograms and triangles and work out special puzzles for himself.

*

Charles admired his father very much for being good at Latin and mathematics, and for writing books about religion. He knew his father had done well in his examin-

ations at the University, and had twice been in the first class: he had won something called a double first. Charles admired him, too, for the way he told funny stories. Sometimes his father's great friend, Mr Durnford, the Rector of Middleton, called, or Mr. Bayne, the headmaster of Warrington Grammar School; Charles noticed they never were serious for long. They came looking heavy and solemn enough, with frowns on their faces; but when they had talked about things like religion, and education, and the price of corn, they would always stop for tea, or a glass of wine, or a slice of Mrs. Dodgson's excellent veal-and-ham pie to sustain them on their journey home. And then Mr Dodgson would light his clay pipe, and puff away at it, and sit back in his big leather-covered chair by the fireside, and invent one story after another, as easily as he puffed up clouds of smoke. They were the strangest stories, the sort of thing Charles dreamed about in dreams, and they were so funny that the tears ran down everyone's cheeks.

Charles knew that his father wasn't just an ordinary clergyman. He couldn't be: he had ideas that no one else had thought of. One Saturday afternoon in the autumn, Charles put on his red woollen muffler, and thick shoes, and he and Mr Dodgson took their usual Saturday walk on the banks of the canal. It flowed its slow and murky way through the outskirts of Daresbury parish; and along it slid broad barges heavy with cattle fodder, or bearing provisions to and from nearby towns. There were very few railways, yet, so most of the things people needed in country towns were carried by the barges. There were sacks of corn, and barrels of beer, and boxes of cabbages, carrots and cauliflowers. Sometimes, just before Christmas, you might see a trussed-up turkey or two, bundled into a sack and addressed to somebody you knew. Charles

loved to catch a glimpse of the cosy cabin below the deck, with its gleaming mirrors, its blue and scarlet furniture painted with gay flowers. Sometimes he saw the bargeman's wife and children sitting there, eating bread and cheese, or munching apples, gathered round the fire. He would have loved to climb on board, and drift with them down the water.

This afternoon one of the barges drew in to the bank, and while he gazed into the warm little cabin, his father talked a long while to the bargeman: a big, burly man with a brown face and pale blue eyes.

'They are in great need, Charlie,' Mr Dodgson said, when the barge had glided on again.

'Whatever could they need, Papa?' Charles couldn't understand how people who lived inside a barge could ever want anything else.

'They need more money and more food,' answered Mr Dodgson. 'And they need religious care, which I should give them. . . . But how can I get them to come to church?'

How indeed could he get them to come? And what would happen, wondered Charles, if all the bargemen and their wives and children suddenly arrived? There would be so many of them that the building would overflow.

'What can you do?' he asked.

The rector stopped in his tracks and banged his walking stick on the ground.

'Charles,' he said, 'suppose we built a church inside one of the barges?'

'I've never seen a church like that, Papa.'

'Nor have I, my boy. But give me a hundred pounds, and I'll turn a barge into a chapel. I'll build the pews down either side . . .' he sketched it out among the fallen leaves on the grass - 'and I'll have the altar here, and my

pulpit there . . . no, there's only room for another seat. . . . And I think we'd get about thirty or forty in the congregation . . .'

'That's a fine idea, Papa!'

'Excellent!' said his father. 'After matins to-morrow I'll have a word with Lord Francis Egerton. He has great estates round here. I'm sure he has the hundred pounds I need.'

A few weeks later, Lord Francis wrote to say that the chapel was ready. And after that, every Sunday evening, Mr Dodgson would stride down to the canal, with his surplice and full white sleeves billowing in the wind; and he would take evensong in the first barge to be a church in England.

*

Charles was full of admiration for his father's strange inventions; but his own inventions were more exciting. At Daresbury it was so quiet that if he saw a carriage spanking past with a whirr of scarlet wheels, it was an event in his life.

'Who do you think is in that carriage?' asked Fanny, his eldest sister, one bright morning. A glossy yellow carriage, with a big coat-of-arms on the door, had just clattered past. 'Did you see the driver?' she went on. 'He wore a scarlet coat, with gold frogging on it, and a blue and gold cockade on his hat. There must have been a real princess inside.'

'A real squirrel princess.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Charlie! How can squirrels be princesses?'

'Why shouldn't they be princesses, Fanny, and kings and queens and princes? Someone has to rule over the

rest. There must be a king in the squirrel kingdom, up in the oak-tree branches, and he has to travel by carriage on the ground.'

'You're still talking nonsense, Charlie,' said Fanny.

'No, I'm not. There's no such thing as nonsense. Besides, you didn't *see* who was sitting in the yellow carriage. For all you know, it *was* a squirrel princess, on her way to a party. And perhaps the driver was a fish.'

'He looked just like a man,' said Fanny, feeling quite uneasy.

'I'm not surprised. Grown-ups look just like fish, when they are being serious and solemn. When I see a fish on the kitchen table, with those staring eyes, I think of Mr. Bayne and Mr Durnford. That's how they look when they talk about things like learning and the poor.'

'Do you really mean it?' Fanny asked. 'Do you think there was a fish inside the carriage?'

'I think it was the king and queen of the fish,' decided Charles, 'with a frog coachman in gold lace to whip up the two horses, and a frog footman to stand on the box behind.'

*

Charles always had the strangest ideas. Only a few days later, Fanny found him burrowing with his hands in the corner of the garden.

'What *are* you doing, Charlie?' she asked.

He looked up.

'You needn't feel so special just because you're four years older,' he answered. 'I've found three earthworms. Look!'

Fanny screamed. 'Oh, the horrid, dirty, wriggly

things,!' she cried. 'Don't you dare drop them down my neck or let them squirm on my pinafore!'

'I shouldn't do anything so silly. I want one more worm, and then I've got two a side, and then the glorious battle can begin.'

'Battle?' asked Fanny. She was wearing a new red-and-white checked dress. She felt very prim and proper. 'Battle?' she repeated. 'I should have thought that worms would fight by themselves, without your getting all covered with earth and leaf-mould.'

'But they don't fight in a civilised way,' said Charles, quite seriously. 'And that's just what I'm teaching them to do. I've had a long talk with them, and explained all the rules of battle. I've given them little pieces of clay pipe to fight with. Now we should have a proper fight: a really glorious battle, like the one Papa described this morning.'

'Waterloo?' asked Fanny, who enjoyed her history lessons.

'Yes, Waterloo. Here are two English worms. When I find another French one, the battle can begin.'

'I think you're silly,' Fanny said, tossing back her ringlets. 'All this talking to animals, as if they were real. . . .'

Charles pulled a fourth fat worm from the flower-bed and lined it up for the fight.

'But they *are* real,' he replied, giving it some pipe. 'They are quite as real as you and me. Snails are very sensible, and as for that ant-hill there, it's like a little town full of people. Why, only yesterday they were having an argument about provisions, and I had to settle it. . . .'

'Charlie, you might have got bitten!'

'Don't you fuss so, Fanny. I didn't touch them, I just talked to them, and gave them crumbs.'

'You *talked* to them?' Fanny couldn't bring herself to

believe it. She was too grown up, nowadays, to talk to her dolls, let alone to ants.

'Of course I talked to them,' said Charles. 'Just as I often talk to my friend the toad – he's a good companion, we often talk for hours.'

Fanny still didn't quite believe him.

'But I don't talk English,' he explained. 'I talk a special language I've invented. I can talk it as well as English, now.'

'Talk it to me,' demanded Fanny. She was anxious not to miss anything, though of course she didn't really believe him.

'The jabberwocky bandersnatch did gimble in the wabe. . . .'

Fanny threw back her head and laughed.

'Jabberwocky . . . bandersnatch . . . but that's all nonsense, Charlie!'

'It isn't nonsense at all, My special language has rules, just like English, and really sensible people can understand it.'

He gave a tiny piece of clay pipe to one of the English earthworms. Fanny scuffed away down the gravel path. 'Jabberwocky . . . bandersnatch . . . ' she repeated to herself. 'In the gimble . . . in the wabe. . . .'

The funny thing was that the words felt as if they really had a meaning. Perhaps there *was* sense behind them, if only she could find it.



2

1840: Eight Years Old

There was some sense behind most of the things that Charles said and did, even though these things were unexpected.

'What *are* you doing this time?' asked his second sister, Elizabeth (she was always known as Memy), one afternoon. 'You've been peeling those rushes, now, for hours and hours.'

'Can't you see I'm getting the pith out?'

'What for?'

'To give to the poor.'

What the poor could do with it, he couldn't quite explain. Perhaps they would weave baskets or thatch cottages.

'Well, come and play, anyway!' said Memy, feeling the conversation was difficult. 'Let's go down and climb in the marlpits.' Memy liked boyish games.

'I'll come,' he said. 'We can do lots of things in the marlpits as well as climbing. We can watch the people dig out the soil to spread over the fields. It's special soil, you know, it makes the crops grow.'

'I found a granite ball in the pit last time,' confided Memy.

'I found some treasures, too,' said Charles. 'I keep them upstairs, in my special drawer.'

'What sort of treasures?'

'All kinds of fossils. Fossils are animals and plants that have turned to stone with age. I found one like a snail, all grey and curly.'

'Let's go to the marlpits at once,' said Memy.

'It's one of my favourite places,' Charles went on. 'It's full of wonders. When Papa reads that passage from the Bible about the wonders of the deep, I always think of the marlpits, and all the things buried in them. I know if you dug a tunnel deep enough you'd get to Wonderland.'

'You'd never dig deep enough,' sighed Memy. 'You'd need special spades to dig with.'

'I'm going to make a special spade. I wasn't going to tell you till I'd finished it. It was going to be a surprise. But I've told Papa. . . .'

'I think you're *mean*.'

'I'm not mean at all. Papa had to know, because he was

going to Leeds and I asked him if he'd buy me some proper tools there.'

'What sort of tools?'

'Oh, a file and a screwdriver, and a ring.'

'Why do you want a ring?'

'Oh, Memy, you wouldn't understand. Girls don't understand about carpentry.'

Memy tore off her straw bonnet with the pink silk ribbons, and flung it on the ground. 'I think you're *horrible*!' she cried. 'You're simply *horrible*!'

'Children, children!' said a voice, 'Whatever is the matter?'

Mrs Dodgson stood in the parsonage doorway. She was wearing a blue-and-white checked apron over her blue dress. In one hand she held a pudding basin. In the other she was holding a basket of peas, to be shelled for dinner.

'You don't deserve your favourite dinner if you behave like that,' she said quietly. 'Now, Memy, pick up your bonnet this instant, and put it on again; you musn't catch the sun.'

Memy put on her bonnet again.

'Charlie said I didn't know about carpentry.'

'Girls don't understand about carpentry, Memy,' Mrs Dodgson answered. 'But they understand a great many other things. They know how to mend and sew and embroider, and keep a house in order. They know how to cook and bottle and preserve. Now, Memy dear, be sensible, and shell these peas for me. And Charlie, don't tease Memy any more. What would Papa say if he knew? He asked me in his letter if you were good.'

'Has he written to me, too?' Charles burst out.

Mrs Dodgson laughed.

'Yes, Charlie, he has sent you a letter. It's just arrived. Now, let me see. . . .'

She felt in her apron pocket, and drew out a square white envelope.

'Here it is. Now I must go and prepare the dinner. I need some mint to put with the potatoes.'

She went off into the kitchen garden.

'What's in the letter?' asked Memy.

Charles tore it open, and read:

Dearest Charlie,

. . . I will not forget your commission. As soon as I get to Leeds I shall scream out in the middle of the street, Ironmongers – Iron – mongers – Six hundred men will rush out of their shops in a moment – fly, fly, in all directions – ring the bells, call the constables – set the town on fire. I will have a file & a screwdriver, & a ring, & if they are not brought directly, in forty seconds I will leave nothing but one small cat alive in the whole town of Leeds. . . .

'Whatever would happen then?' cried Memy.

Charles went on with the letter:

Then what a bawling & a tearing of hair there will be! Pigs & babies, camels & butterflies, rolling in the gutter together – old women rushing up the chimneys & cows after them – ducks hiding themselves in coffee cups, & fat geese trying to squeeze themselves into pencil cases – at last the Mayor of Leeds will be found in a soup plate covered up with custard & stuck full of almonds to make him look like a sponge cake that he may escape the dreadful destruction of the Town. . . .

At last they bring the things which I ordered & then I spare the Town & send off in fifty waggons & under the protection of 10,000 soldiers, a file & a screwdriver and a ring as a present to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson from his aff^{nte} Papa.

'It sounds as if he means to buy your things,' said Memy,

thoughtfully. 'Let's shell the peas together, and then we can go to the marlpits and explore.'

*

They went together across the fields to the pit that they knew best; they picked their way carefully down to the bottom. It wasn't the deepest of the pits, but, as they looked up, the sides seemed to tower above them. Here and there they saw dark holes as if someone had really started to dig a tunnel through to Wonderland.

'And I'm sure it's Wonderland,' said Charles, 'because the earth is full of peculiar creatures turned to stone, all sorts of animals and plants that lived thousands of years ago. You never see animals like them to-day.'

He poked about gently, with a stick, among the broken bits of stone on the ground.

'We mustn't touch the walls,' he said, 'in case we bring something down. But if we look hard enough down here we may find a treasure or two.'

Memy's heart was thumping hard as they rummaged round, and picked up pieces and examined them. At last it began to get rather chilly, and the sun went down. She wrapped her yellow shawl round her shoulders.

'I think we ought to go back,' she said. 'We musn't be late for dinner. I'm afraid we haven't got time to find anything, now.'

Her voice echoed round the marlpit like a giant voice. Charles didn't answer. He was bending over something, and looking at it hard. She scrambled over to him.

'Whatever is it, Charlie?'

He had torn a big piece out of one of his jacket sleeves, but he was so excited that he hadn't noticed.

'I've found two treasures,' he said. 'One each.'

He was holding two bits of stone: one of them had a clear imprint of a beautiful curly fern right across it; the other was a curious shell, twisted into a spiral.

Memy chose the fern.

'We - may - not - need - the - special - spade - after - all,' she panted, as they ran back home across the fields. As they got to the parsonage door, they heard the gong sound.

*

Soon after their father came home from Leeds, they all set out on an even more exciting adventure. Mr Dodgson decided to take the family on a holiday. When the great day came, they left Kitty and Dinah, the parsonage cats, with one of the neighbours, and they all dressed up in their holiday clothes. Charles wore his new long trousers and a new 'roundabout' straw hat; the girls wore muslin frocks and long pantalets, and tied poke bonnets over their cork-screw curls. Seven packages and four trunks were strapped on behind the coach, Mrs Dodgson and the girls climbed inside, with little Skeffington. Charles sat on the box outside, beside Papa and the coachman, and off they went.

The first place they stopped at was Chester. Charles had read all about it in history books; he knew that the Romans had built the city as a garrison for their soldiers, and you could still walk round the Roman walls. And as the horses trotted on, and the breeze turned his cheeks quite pink, Mr Dodgson told him how, after the Romans left Britain, the Scots and the Picts, who were barbarians, crossed the border into England, and the Britons asked the Saxons to help them defeat the invaders. Two Saxon chiefs, called Hengist and Horsa, had fought a fierce battle for the city.

Hengist and Horsa, they were strange names. They were the sort of names that made you invent a story. Charles was always inventing stories: sometimes he wrote them down, sometimes he told them to Fanny and Memy. sometimes they just went on and on growing inside his head. All the time they were eating their lunch of roast lamb and potatoes and peas at the coaching inn at Chester, he was thinking hard about Hengist and Horsa. They were wearing red and blue tunics, and curious leggings like bandages wrapped round their legs. They were fighting a mighty battle for the city of Chester. Every now and then they stopped to take a bite out of a very large ham sandwich.

'More mustard?' asked Hengist. 'I always think it improves the flavour of the ham. And a little pepper does no harm.'

'A touch of ketchup is the thing,' said Horsa. 'I prefer the tomato kind.'

He took a bottle labelled KETCHUP out of his tunic pocket, and poured it over the sandwich.

'Not my cup of tea at all,' said Hengist.

'Ham sandwiches aren't tea,' retorted Horsa. 'Don't be stupid. You might as well say that carrots are buttered eggs, or buttered eggs are carrots.'

'It comes to the same thing in the end,' said Hengist.

'No, it doesn't. And anyway,' added Horsa, 'it's time for battle. Where did I put my clock?'

He felt in his pocket and brought out a handsome timepiece.

'It has stopped,' he said. 'There's ketchup in it. Look, it's dripping out.'

He opened the back of the clock, and poured out a quantity of tomato ketchup.

'It was my secret store, in case of need,' he said to Hengist. 'Ketchup gives you strength, and that is what you need for fighting battles.'

'Which reminds me,' Hengist said, 'don't you think it's time the fight began again?'

'I don't know what to think. The clock's stopped,' Horsa sobbed. 'It really is *too* vexing.'

'It needn't be,' answered Hengist, in a soothing sort of voice. 'It means it can be any time we choose.'

He took the clock, and turned the hands to half-past four.

'It's time for tea,' he said. 'May I offer you another sandwich?'

'Finish your lunch, Charlie, there's a good boy,' Mrs Dodgson interrupted.

'Were you making up stories again?' asked Memy, scraping her plate.

'Of course.' Charles took another mouthful of peas and gravy. 'It's all about . . .'

'Hurry up, Charlie dear,' Mrs Dodgson insisted. 'The coach is setting off in ten minutes' time. You can tell us all your new story next time we stop.'

*

The four horses were changed every twenty miles at posting inns on the road. They cantered briskly through the countryside. Sometimes they drove down important roads, and saw all sorts of carriages, landaus and barouches, speeding on their way; sometimes they made their way down country lanes, and saw humble little dog-carts jogging past, or clumsy waggons laden with bales of hay, lumbering towards the nearest farm. But however hard old Philips drove, the Dodgsons' coach was weighed down with children and luggage, and the road was long. It took them two whole days to reach Beaumaris.

Beaumaris was one of the largest towns in Anglesey,

the island off the north coast of Wales. To get to Anglesey, they had to cross the new suspension bridge across the Menai Straits.

'A suspension bridge is a hanging bridge, Charlie,' Mr Dodgson said, as they drove towards it. 'This bridge is hung from one coast to the other.'

'Just like a hammock?' Charles enquired.

'Exactly like a hammock. It was built by a great engineer called Thomas Telford, and it cost one hundred and twenty thousand pounds.'

'How long did they take to build it, Papa?'

Mr Dodgson felt in his pocket, drew out a small buff-covered guidebook, and rapidly turned the pages.

'We are both mathematicians, Charlie,' he answered, with a smile. 'We must have our facts correct. . . . Yes, here we are: they took nearly six years to build the bridge. They began it in 1820; it was opened to the public in 1826. And it took seventeen hundred and fifteen feet of huge chains to support it. I see that it weighs some three hundred and fifty tons.'

The coach entered one of the carriageways across the bridge. On the other carriageway, across the footpath, Charles saw the traffic clattering back to the mainland.

'Well,' enquired Mr Dodgson, taking off his hat, and letting the breezes blow through his grey hair, 'well, Charlie, how does it feel to be travelling in mid-air?'

'It's like flying, Papa.'

'We are so high up,' Mr Dodgson said, 'that you could stand three houses on top of one another and they still wouldn't touch the bottom of the bridge.'

Charles was just wondering what would happen if the bridge went rusty, when they reached the Isle of Anglesey.

They cantered on to Beaumaris Bay. It was late in the afternoon, and the light was changing from white to pink

and gold over the mountains, the hills and valleys, the castles, parks and waters.

'Look at the boats!' he cried, excitedly, pointing out to sea.

A shoal of little pleasure boats were rocking very gently at their moorings; a fleet of small schooners, laden with slate from nearby quarries, were floating lazily with the gentle tide. Their sails and hulls were reflected in the clear water. Across the bay came the sound of a band, striking up a rousing march as a steamer came in to Beaumaris with its crowded deck of holidaymakers.

'And there,' added Mr Dodgson, pointing to a black shape on the horizon, 'is the huge steamer sailing from Liverpool. Alas, some years ago there was a tragedy . . .'

Mrs Dodgson happened to hear the last words, and put her head out of the window.

'Now, my dear, don't tell the children. . . .'

'Frances, my love,' said Mr Dodgson firmly, 'every child must learn that ships are sometimes lost in the great deep.'

'Did a ship sink near here, Papa?' asked Charles.

'Not far from here, my boy. The *Rothersey Castle* foundered off Puffin Island, and one hundred persons gave up their souls to God.'

Charles was silent for a moment. Then,

'Puffin Island?' he asked. 'I thought puffins were birds.'

'You were quite correct,' said Mr Dodgson. 'You will still find many puffins, and countless other sea birds, on Puffin Island.'

'Do people live there?'

Mr Dodgson consulted his book again.

'I understand,' he said, 'that only the telegraph keeper lives there now. But once upon a time, the hermits lived

their godly and righteous and sober lives on the island, praying, and shunning the wickedness of the world. You can still see the ruins of their establishment: a solitary Norman tower, a few fragments of a church.'

'May we go and see them, Papa?'

'Perhaps we may; there are always boats ready to make excursions. I don't believe they are costly. But I have already planned a more exciting expedition. I have obtained leave from Lord Bulkeley to inspect the ruins of Beaumaris Castle.'

*

At this point they reached the pretty town of Beaumaris itself, with its old church and tower, and its clean white streets. In fact there were only two proper thoroughfares: Watergate Street and Castle Street. The Dodgsons had taken rooms in Mrs Rhys's lodging-house in Castle Street. There was one room for Mr and Mrs Dodgson, a large room for the girls, and a tiny room for the two boys.

Charles loved his cosy room, and the patchwork quilt on his bed. The white silk patches, said Mrs Rhys, came from the wedding dress she had worn forty-seven years ago; the bits of blue velvet cut into diamond shapes came from a dress that had once been her Sunday best. As for the cotton with the pink rosebuds, it had belonged to her little girl, Lucy, who was grown-up now, and had married and gone to live in Devonshire.

'What about the scarlet cloth?' asked Charles. 'It looks like a soldier's tunic.'

'That it does,' said Mrs Rhys. 'It is a piece of a real soldier's uniform. It belonged to my poor dear husband, Private Rhys of the 39th Foot. He was the bravest soldier that ever was.'

Charles would have liked to ask her more about brave Private Rhys. Perhaps he had died on the field of battle, and that was why she was sad. But as she wiped a tear from her eyes with the corner of her white cotton apron, he couldn't ask any more questions. He fell asleep, that night, and dreamed of a dashing soldier in scarlet, with plumes on his helmet, and a drawn sword in his hand. He was Private Rhys of the 39th Foot charging down on the French at Waterloo.

Charles woke early next morning, and sniffed the gusts of salt sea air blowing through the window. He climbed out of bed very quietly, so as not to wake Skeffington, and put on his blue woollen dressing-gown. Then he tiptoed across to the window, and looked out. There was the beach, and there were some curious boxes on wheels, standing by the edge of the water: they were the bathing machines that he had heard about. Mrs Dodgson had told him how you changed into special bathing costumes inside them and were carried out to swim at sea. As he watched, he saw two early bathers pick their way down the shingle, and talk to a woman who owned a bathing machine. She was called the 'dipper'. She let down a little flight of steps behind the machine, and in they climbed. Then she harnessed a small pony to the shafts of the machine, and led it on into the water.

'Charles! What *are* you doing out of bed, without your slippers?'

Mrs Dodgson stood by the door. She was wearing her best pink wrap over her flannel nightdress. Her hair was still done up in curl-papers.

'I'm looking at the bathing-machines, Mama. Do you think we might go and dig on the sands to-day?'

'If Papa can find you some wooden spades, I should think you can,' said his mother. 'But we have a nice sur-

prise for you. Mrs Rhys has lent us two baskets, and we're going to pick mushrooms for our breakfast. Now wake up, Skeff!

She bent over the little bed in the corner, and gently stroked Skeffington's hair. Half-an-hour later, all the Dodgson family were exploring a big field behind the town; and there, in the early morning dew, as Mrs Rhys had told them, were dozens and dozens of fat white mushrooms ready to be picked and gently fried in butter and put on toast.

*

Mrs Rhys was an excellent cook: she gave them cherry tart and custard for lunch, and delicious plum cake for tea. She made treacle toffee for the children. (Memy ate too much of it and got dreadful toothache and felt quite faint; Mrs Dodgson had to hold a phial of sal volatile to her nose to revive her.) Mrs Rhys was also a wonderful person for telling stories, and they loved going down to her kitchen to listen to her. She would let them scrape out the pudding basins when she made chocolate cakes, and she let them play with her two black kittens. The kittens used to get tangled up in balls of worsted (she was always knitting) and run round and round in circles after their tails. When they had had their exercise, Mrs Rhys would give them saucers of creamy milk, because cats deserved the best. Then she would settle down in her rocking-chair, and fold her plump hands in her lap, and tell the strangest stories about the sea. She would tell the children about the creatures who lived underneath the waves, and the weird things that used to happen on Puffin Island. She told them tales of the fishermen, and what they had found on the ocean. And some of the fishermen's stories must have been true, because on her dresser, where she kept the

great blue-and-white service of china with sixty pieces, she kept a shell which a fisherman had given her; and if you put your ear to it, you could hear the sea. Mrs Rhys also kept a red cap, which looked like a night-cap, but she said it had once belonged to a pirate in Zanzibar. She had a pair of gold earrings in a china bowl on the mantelpiece; she never wore them, but she said she would never give them away. An old sailor had brought them back from the Canary Islands, and she knew they would bring her luck.

*

One afternoon, when Mr Dodgson was having his after-lunch sleep and Mrs Dodgson was busy attending to the younger children, Charles and Fanny and Memy slipped down to the kitchen.

‘Let’s thank Mrs Rhys for our lunch,’ said Memy. ‘It was quite delicious.’

‘Let’s ask her if she will tell us another story.’

But, for the first time, Mrs Rhys sadly shook her head.

‘I’ve told you all the stories I know,’ she said.

The children looked at one another, and their faces fell.

‘Can’t you even think of a little story?’ asked Memy.

‘Just a very short one? We are all so disappointed.’

Mrs Rhys wiped her hands on her apron, and put the last dishes away.

‘There’s nothing I’d like better, my dears, than to tell you all a tale about the sea. But I can’t for the life of me think of one to-day. Just suppose I settled myself for a change in my old rocking-chair, and one of you told a nice sea story to *me*?’

Fanny and Memy looked at Charles.

‘Go on, Charlie,’ Fanny said.

So Charles sat down on a red-covered stool, and took

one of the kittens on his lap. It was all warm and purring.

'If you like,' he began, 'I'll tell you the sad tale of the sea-horse and the wicked crab.'

There was once a very little sea-horse: indeed it was so small that it was about the size of a sea-pony. It lived with its mother in a quiet rock-pool by the edge of the sea. They lived deep down in a narrow cleft among the waving sea-weeds; they were so cut off from the sea that they hardly noticed if the tide was coming in or going out.

'How I should like to see the ocean, dear Mama,' the little sea-horse sighed. 'Life is sometimes very boring in this quiet pool. I want to swim beneath the coral groves and sunken treasure-ships. I want to see the bright-coloured sea-anemones. Who knows? I might even discover a mermaid of my own if you would only let me swim away.'

'My child,' said the mother sea-horse, 'life may be very quiet where we are, but beware the ocean and its tides! You are too young and small and unprotected to venture in the vast Atlantic swell.'

The little sea-horse cried and cried in its disappointment. The mother sea-horse swam away to find the next day's food. Alas, when she had gone, a wicked crab came sidling up to the edge of the narrow cleft, and called down in its most engaging voice.

'Little sea-horse,' said the crab, 'why not swim to sea in search of purple sea-anemones? It is a shame, I do declare, for creatures of such spirit to be kept at home by their mamas.'

The crab spoke most persuasively; the little sea-horse wriggled its eager way to the surface of the pool. And just then came a mighty wave, and cut short any argument. It swept the crab and sea-horse out to sea.

The little sea-horse was afraid, the currents were so strong; it clung fast to the crab's shell with its tail.

'I have no time for helpless things like you,' declared the crab, and shook the little sea-horse off its back.

Just then a huge black finny shape loomed at them from the deep: a shark, with teeth as sharp as knives and saws. It snapped the crab up at a bite; but the poor little sea-horse had just enough strength left to dart aside.

At last a kindly wave arrived, and, with a single push, it carried the small sea-horse home again. The mother sea-horse was overjoyed. The little sea-horse vowed it would never disobey Mama again.

Charles put the kitten on the floor. Mrs Rhys wiped the tears off her cheeks.

‘Well, Master Charles,’ she said, ‘I declare that’s the best sea story I’ve heard. And mark my words: I feel it in my bones you’re going to tell some famous tales one day.’

*

It was a lovely holiday. They built castles on the beach, and found crabs and curious starfish in the pools. They watched the gay carriages sparkling round Beaumaris promenade, and admired the pink and lemon parasols, the blue and pale-green dresses of the passengers. Mr Dodgson sat for hours, watching the cricket matches on the Green, and one afternoon he paid twopence for each of his family, and took them along the pier, which stretched right out into the straits. They stood by the flagstaff at the far end, where the Union Jack was waving, and admired the wide sweep of scenery round the town.

‘There’s the castle!’ Memy cried. ‘When can we visit it?’

‘We are seeing it to-morrow,’ said Mr Dodgson. ‘And as we walk down the pier again, I will tell you all a little of its history.’

So, as they walked the long stretch of pier back to the town, he told them how King Edward I had built Beau-

maris Castle in the last years of the thirteenth century, to subdue the wild men of Wales. He explained how the outer walls were nearly perfect still, and how the inner walls were built with towers along them, at intervals, so that observers could scan the countryside.

‘Those inner walls are sixteen feet thick,’ Mr Dodgson said. ‘They built a corridor inside them, to lead from one watch tower to another.’

Next day, they all went round the Castle, and Charles and Memy saw the long dark passages inside the walls; and sometimes they saw steps going right down into the darkness. The guide who took them round said that there were dungeons at the bottom. Charles tugged at Memy’s sleeve. ‘I don’t believe,’ he whispered, ‘there are really dungeons there. I think if you went down you’d find it another way to Wonderland.’



3

1843: Eleven Years Old

One January evening in 1843, the snow was blowing softly against the window-panes, as if it was kissing the window all over outside. The thick red curtains had been drawn to keep out the cold and dark, and Mrs Dodgson sat down with her pile of needlework by the fire. From time to time she would take out another skein of wool from her shiny yellow workbox lined with bright blue silk.

She would screw up her eyes a little (for the candlelight was dim) and carefully thread her needle yet again. She had so many pairs of socks and stockings to darn that particular evening that she felt the mending would never end.

She remembered how, only six years ago, little Skeffington had been the baby of the family. She had only six children then; now she had nine. She gazed fondly at little Wilfred, who was looking at a picture book; and how she loved Louisa, and the gay little elf-like Margaret, who was always called Maggie by the rest! But she had often wondered how her husband could support such a very big family – and now a tenth child was on its way.

‘When is Papa coming home?’ asked Charles, putting down his pencil. ‘I have drawn him my caterpillar, with all its feet.’

‘May I see the picture, Charlie?’ Mrs Dodgson asked. He got up from the stool in the corner, and brought the picture over, eagerly.

‘Oh, what a wonderful creature you’ve drawn!’ his mother cried. ‘What colour will you paint it, brown or yellow?’

‘I shall paint it green, Mama. And I should like to colour it myself, and put in all the flowers in the corner of the garden where it lives. And caterpillars aren’t called “it,” Mama, they’re called “him,” just like me. This one is Christopher.’

‘Why?’ asked Wilfred.

‘I’ll tell you, Will. Our great-great-grandpapa was called Christopher Dodgson. This caterpillar is very, very old, and very wise. So he’s called Christopher, too.’

‘How do you know he’s old?’ asked Wilfred.

‘Because he moves so slowly, just like the old sidesman in the church. It takes him ages and ages to walk anywhere. I know he’s wise, because we often have long argu-

ments together, and he knows a great deal about grammar.'

'What's grammar, Charlie?'

'Grammar is the rules you use for speaking English. It means things like nouns and verbs and ad . . .'

'Hush, children!' Mrs Dodgson said, putting down her mending. 'My head is aching with all the noise – and I think I hear your father at the door.'

It was indeed Mr Dodgson. They heard him stamp the snow off his shoes, shut the front door behind him, and pause by the little table in the hall. He must have seen the letter waiting, Charlie thought. It looked an important letter, with the coat-of-arms of Queen Victoria, a lion and a unicorn, and a badge with a crown on top, all stamped into the red seal on the back.

Then the door opened. Mr Dodgson hurried into the room. His eyes were bright with pleasure. He looked very handsome, thought Mrs Dodgson; she felt very proud of him. She had missed him when he went away. He had been at Ripon all day yesterday and to-day, for he had been appointed a chaplain to the Bishop.

'Let me take your coat,' she said. 'It has been snowing hard. I can see thick patches of snow on your shoulders.'

'I couldn't get a carriage, my dear,' Mr Dodgson explained, 'they wouldn't send horses out on icy roads. And as the cob was here, I had to walk from Warrington.'

'You poor thing!' Mrs Dodgson cried. 'Seven miles! And on a day like this!' She helped him out of his coat. 'But at least your suit is dry. Here are your slippers; they're all warm and comfortable, because I've been keeping them ready by the fire. And now I will fetch a glass of brandy for you. I think you need a warm drink after your journey.'

Mr Dodgson sat down with a sigh of relief in the big

chair by the fire and stretched his feet out on the fender.

'You are very kind, my dear. But before you go, I have a warming piece of news for everyone.'

He held up the letter with the red seal, now broken.

'My good friend, Lord Francis Egerton,' Mr Dodgson said, 'has written a generous letter to the Prime Minister. He has been kind enough to tell him about my work for the bargemen; he has told him about my Sunday school, and the growing congregation. Sir Robert Peel has offered me the living of Croft, in Yorkshire. It is a Crown living, worth nearly £900 a year.'

'We must give thanks to our merciful God!' Mrs Dodgson cried. 'I can hardly believe this is true.'

'Here is the letter, my love,' said her husband. 'You may see for yourself that we have been blessed indeed.'

He handed her the momentous letter. She held it near the candle, where the light was brightest; and you could have heard a pin drop as she read it.

Whitehall, Jan. 12 1843.

Sir,

There is no part of my public Duty which is more gratifying to me, than the appropriation of such Church Patronage as may be at my disposal, to the Reward and Encouragement of active professional Exertions by men of unblemished private Character and great intellectual attainment. In conformity with this principle, and exclusively upon the ground of your professional services and claims, I have resolved to appoint you to the Living of Croft in the N. Riding of Yorkshire. . . .

I make the offer to you upon the full understanding, in the case of a Living of so much value, that you will be enabled to reside upon the Living and to discharge the Parochial Duties in Person.

*I have, &c., &c.,
Robert Peel.*

'You see that the letter is dated 12 January,' Mr Dodgson said, as calmly as he could. 'To-day is the fourteenth. I have missed a post. But before I drink that glass of brandy, Frances, I shall write to Sir Robert and explain the reasons for my delay in replying. I shall tell him that we are anxious to move to Croft as soon as possible.'

'Are we leaving Daresbury, Papa?' asked Charles. His voice seemed strange and faint, as if it didn't quite belong to him.

'Yes, Charlie, indeed we are,' said his father.

'And the toads and rabbits and earthworms?' asked Charles. The back of his throat was aching. 'And Christopher Caterpillar? And the marlpits, and the chapel in the barge?' He felt hot tears in his eyes. They were starting to trickle down his cheeks. He could not imagine what life would be without such everyday things.

Mrs Dodgson put her arms round him. 'Of course it's sad to leave them,' she said, gently. 'But you'll find that Croft is much better for us all. Your father needs a wider field to work in. Croft will bring more money to the family – and, besides, it will give you children a much more exciting life.'

Charles felt a little ashamed of himself, his mother seemed so happy, there was such a smile on her gentle face. He felt he had been rather selfish – and she was the most unselfish person he knew. He had never heard her utter a harsh or impatient word.

'Now, Memy,' Mr Dodgson said, 'fetch me a pen and paper, and a pot of ink, and that little sloping writing-desk with the green baize cover, the one I can prop up on my knees. I will answer Sir Robert's letter this moment.'

Memy scampered into the study, and came back with all he wanted. Her heart was thumping with excitement, and she only hoped she would not spill the ink in her hurry.

And then, as all the family sat round and watched him write, Mr Dodgson penned a letter to the Prime Minister.

Daresbury – Warrington.

Jany 14, 1843.

Sir,

I regret that my absence from home yesterday has caused the delay of a post in my reply to your letter of the 12th Instant.

I find it utterly impossible to describe the feelings of pleasure and gratitude, with which I have received a communication so highly important to me, and so much enhanced in its value by the peculiarly kind terms in which it is conveyed. . . . I should be doing culpable injustice to my own feelings, did I fail to express how deeply sensible I am of the high distinction conferred by the notice with which you have honoured me.

I beg to assure you that I shall be anxious to commence my residence at Croft with as little delay as circumstances will admit of; and I earnestly trust that I may be enabled so to devote myself to the duties of my Care, as, in some measure at least, to justify your choice, & repay your kindness.

I have the honour to remain, Sir, with unfeigned respect,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

Charles Dodgson.

The Right Hon: Sir Robert Peel, Bart,

Esq. Esq. Esq.

*

A few weeks later, Mr Dodgson had made the final arrangements at Croft Rectory. He had decided to keep two cows there, and give a can of milk to any of his parishioners who wanted it. He had decided to keep on William, the outdoor man who had worked for the old Rector for nineteen years. He seemed as excited as a boy about his new preferment; but Charles still couldn't bear the thought of leaving Daresbury.

After all, he had been born there; it had been his home

for the whole of his life, eleven years. He knew every rabbit-hole and oak tree, every place in the wide yellow cornfields where he had seen a lark hovering and singing over her nest. No wonder he kept a calendar, and sadly, every evening, marked off another day. He grew sadder and sadder as the toys were packed: the spotted wooden horse, the drum and drumsticks, the eleven lead soldiers who had sometimes fought the earthworms in glorious battle. The clothes were washed and ironed and neatly folded and put with lavender bags into black tin trunks. He saw them pack the scarlet muffler he always wore in the winter, and Memy's pantaloons and Fanny's pinafores. Most of the furniture had been sent on; the pictures had been taken down, and there were dark oblong patches on the walls.

'Don't cry,' said Fanny, the last afternoon before they went. 'It won't do any good. You must be brave like Grandpapa in the army.'

'I know I must be brave,' said Charles. 'But you haven't got so many hundreds of friends to leave behind you. How would *you* like saying good-bye to all of them at once?'

'I couldn't say it,' Fanny said. 'I simply couldn't say it. I'd have to take them with me.'

They looked at one another.

'Fanny! Fanny!' He rubbed away the tears with his fists. His cheeks looked very smudgy. 'Fanny!' he cried. 'That's the best idea you've ever had!'

Fanny felt very proud indeed. And also very happy. To tell the truth, she hadn't wanted to leave it all behind either.

'Let's get a big box and put the friends in,' suggested Charles.

'And give them food. Friends must have food,' said Fanny. 'Stay here. I'll get Memy.'

A few minutes later, there was a heavy, scuffling, shuffling sound, and the girls came down the path with a box. It was a big one made of wood; when they put it down and took off the lid, Charles could see there was plenty of room for his best friends.

He spent the whole afternoon collecting them together. He collected his friend the toad and half-a-dozen French earthworms (and half-a-dozen English ones, for battles). He picked up a few sensible snails; he scrambled in the marlpits and dug out two fat fossils. He found three pale blue speckled thrushes' eggs in a nest; they were cold, so he knew they wouldn't hatch and it was all right to take them. And finally, just where he had left him, he met Christopher, the wise old caterpillar. All of them were put into the box.

Charles and Fanny made little wooden divisions in the box to stop the friends from getting all mixed up, and they bored holes in the lid so that the friends could breathe. Memy collected special food for travelling animals, and put it in with them.

Next day the box of friends was safely strapped on top of the coach, and, from the coach window, Charles took a last look at the square little parsonage, the yellow corn-fields and the spreading oak-trees. A mile and a half further on, they passed through the village of Daresbury, where the inhabitants had turned out to bid their parson farewell. Mr Dodgson had been so kind to the poor that many women, standing in their doorways, were holding up their aprons to dry their eyes.

*

It seemed an even longer journey than the journey to Beaumaris. They made their way through the rich green

pasturelands of Cheshire, where the cows were grazing with quiet contentment; once they saw a milkmaid carrying pails of milk across a farmyard, and Charles guessed it would be made into Cheshire cheese. They drove up hill and down dale through the Pennines, and through the busy manufacturing towns where, Mr Dodgson said, people were weaving the finest woollen cloth to be found in the world. They drove through little villages and hamlets of grey stone houses, and across the wide Yorkshire moors, with their rugged boulders. When they reached the busy town of Darlington, in Yorkshire, Mr Dodgson patted Charles on the arm.

‘This is an interesting place,’ he said. ‘This is where the Stockton and Darlington Railway was opened eighteen years ago.’

‘But there are many railways now, Papa: there are the Grand Junction Railway, and the Manchester and Birmingham Line. . . .’

‘Yes, Charles, but this was the first public railway to have a steam-engine hauling the train along. It was the first proper railway in the world.’

‘I should like to travel on the Darlington railway one day.’

‘Indeed you may,’ Mr Dodgson replied. ‘You will certainly find it easy to reach Darlington. It is only about three miles from our new home by road. The distance is even shorter across the fields.’

The journey was very short indeed; only a few minutes later, they rumbled over the bridge that spanned the river Tees, and Mr. Dodgson pointed out the stone which marked the division between the counties of Durham and Yorkshire. On the Yorkshire side of the bridge was the village of Croft which was to be their home. They had their first glimpse of the quaint old church of St Peter’s,

with its Norman porch; and then, exactly opposite, in the middle of a beautiful garden, they saw a large brick house, three stories high, with a red-tiled roof, tall chimneys, and ivy climbing thickly over the walls. To Charles it looked like a palace.

'This,' said Mr Dodgson, 'is Croft Rectory.'

*

The first thing that Charles and Fanny and Memy did, of course, when they had washed their hands and had their tea, was to find the box of friends from Daresbury. They carried it carefully into the kitchen garden.

'Look at the fruit-trees on the walls!' cried Fanny. 'There are peaches and ripe pears. . . .'

'And I can see apricots!' cried Memy. 'And just look at those greenhouses full of flowers and plants! Let's go and see inside.'

They pressed their noses against the glass.

'Look at those strange, bulgy plants with the spikes all over them,' said Memy. 'I've never seen anything like them before.'

'They're called cactuses,' said Charles. 'I mean cacti - that's the plural. Cactus is a Latin word.'

'Are there any English flowers?' asked Memy, anxiously.

'Of course there are. Do you see those pink and scarlet geraniums in the corner?'

'Let's explore inside,' said Fanny. She opened the door. They smelt a hot, damp, planty sort of smell. There were rows of flower-pots on shelves on either side of the greenhouse, and a narrow path down the middle. They walked down it, smelling the flowers and fingering some of the leaves which looked like velvet.

'I think I saw grapes in the other greenhouse,' remem-

bered Fanny, suddenly. 'Not the fat purple ones, but little green ones.'

They went out, shutting the door behind them, and looked at the other greenhouse. Fanny was right, there was a vine inside climbing up the walls, and here and there tight little bunches of small green grapes hung down.

'They feel quite hard,' said Memy, squeezing one.

'Don't touch them,' Fanny said. 'You might spoil them for afterwards.'

'What about the friends?' asked Memy, changing the subject quickly. 'We ought to let them out, and give them exercise.'

'And fresh air and food,' added Fanny, who was always practical.

'We really ought to find them homes,' said Charles.

They rushed out of the greenhouse and Memy untied the thick rope round the box. Charles put the earthworms in the flower-bed, under an apricot tree, with all the sensible snails to keep them company. He put Christopher, the wise caterpillar, under a red-currant bush where he could eat any currants that fell down. He left the toad by a little pool in the corner.

'What about the thrushes' eggs?' asked Fanny, 'and those nice fat fossils?'

'I'm going to keep them,' Charles decided. 'I think I'm going to make a special box for treasures in my room.'

*

There were so many rooms in Croft Rectory that they could have chosen a different treasure-room for everyone. There was a very long, narrow drawing-room and a long, narrow dining-room. Mr Dodgson had a little study. There were lots of bedrooms of all sorts and sizes and there were

other rooms they had never even heard of at Daresbury: a servants' hall, a butler's pantry, and a housekeeper's room. There were a scullery and a laundry, and a brew-house where Mrs Dodgson promised to make the children ginger-beer. There were two kitchens instead of one, and Charles imagined how good it would be to sit there by the fire, on a winter's day, with a plate of well-buttered girdle-cakes.

'Just look at the larder!' Memy cried. 'It's big enough for feasts!'

'And we've got a dairy too,' said Fanny, 'and two cows.'

'Let's go and explore the coach-house,' said Charles.

'No, let's go and see the stables, and give a lump of sugar to the cob.'

'I want to see the old barn,' said Fanny. 'It will be a wonderful theatre, if there isn't too much hay about.'

They rushed off to the barn. What with all the rooms in the house, and all the buildings outside, they felt as if they had a whole village to themselves.

'Yes, it's very good for plays,' said Memy, when they found themselves in the barn. 'I'd like to nail red curtains to the beams . . .'

'Don't be silly,' Fanny said. 'You couldn't draw the curtains if you nailed them.'

'I'd only nail them at the top, and then we could have something to hold them back in the middle,' said Memy, crossly. 'But what's the use of talking about curtains? We haven't got any plays to act, anyway.'

'I could write some,' Charles decided.

'Charlie! Could you really?' They were full of admiration.

'Of course I could. I don't know what about, yet. But I could invent a play or two, I'm sure.'

'You're always inventing,' Memy said.

'There's so much to be invented. Let's have a look at the pigsties now. Papa said that one of the sows had a litter last week.'

They clambered over the mounds of hay and out into the sunlight. It was a sparkling early summer day. They heard the cows mooing in the fields, the hens clucking in the distance, they heard a cock crow; they also heard an unmistakable snorting and grunting and squealing, over a fence.

They stood on tiptoe and looked over it. And there was the big sow, lying on her side, and feeding five tiny pink pigs.

'Oh, aren't they *sweet*?' cried Fanny. 'I'd like to have one as a pet, and keep it in a basket, and feed it on saucers of milk just like a kitten.'

'You can't have pigs as pets,' said Memy. 'Pigs are meant to be turned into pork chops and pork pies and sausages, and roast pork with lovely crackling. . . .'

'Oh, don't *say* so!'

'But they are,' insisted Memy. 'And pigs smell nasty, too, and they're dirty; and anyway, they're ugly. And anyway,' she added, 'they'd grow up fat and pinky-grey, just like that great big sow. You wouldn't really want *her* as a pet.'

'I think the little pigs look just like Louisa and Maggie and Henrietta when they were born,' said Charles. 'I remember going into Mama's room and seeing them in cradles, and they looked all screwed-up and pink like that. The only difference was they had clothes. Long frilly dresses, with lace all round the edge.'

'I don't think Henrietta looks like a little pig,' said Memy. 'Anyway, I love her very much.'

Mrs Dodgson was feeling tired because of the new baby, Henrietta.

'The trouble is,' she said to Mr Dodgson, one summer morning, 'our bedroom is right underneath the nursery. And though the children are very good and try their best to be quiet, there are sometimes nine of them upstairs, and I can't help hearing them run about.'

'I was woken up at six to-day,' her husband said. 'I think little Will must have knocked down a pile of bricks. I couldn't get to sleep again. The noise is going to disturb us and the baby.'

'It's a pity to change our room,' Mrs Dodgson answered. 'It has such a charming view across the garden. I think we should ask the carpenters to lay a thicker floor in the nursery. Perhaps that would be better for us all.'

So one morning in the middle of June two carpenters, Mr Martin and Mr Sutton, came from the village and, plank by plank, they took up the nursery floor. Charles and Fanny and Memy watched them all the morning.

'It's an old house,' Charles explained. 'You never know what treasures there might be.'

'Misers hide stockings full of gold underneath their floorboards,' added Fanny.

'I don't think the last rector was a miser.'

'Nor do I,' said Charles. 'But the place to hide things is always under floorboards. Mr Martin, have you found any treasure?'

'Nothing at all, Master Charles, I'm afraid.' Mr Martin mopped his forehead with a big red handkerchief. 'And I'm sorry to say I don't think we'll find any now. If there had been any golden sovereigns, we'd have come across them by now. We've taken up the whole nursery floor.'

'We'll go down to the brewhouse, now, and have the pint of ale that's waiting for us,' Mr Sutton decided,

putting down his chisel. 'Perhaps Mrs Andrews will let us have a hunk of bread and cheese. Then we'll be back to lay the new floor. We shan't be long, Master Charles. I'm sorry we couldn't find any treasure for you.'

Mr Sutton and Mr Martin wiped their hands on their coarse blue cotton trousers and went off to the brewhouse. The children heard the clump of their boots on the stairs.

'I think if there isn't any treasure, we ought to put some there,' whispered Charles to Memy.

'So do I. We ought to have buried treasure, just to dig it up at times. On wet afternoons, you know, and times like that.'

'We'll need to keep one of the floorboards loose,' remembered Fanny, 'so that we can find it. Otherwise there wouldn't be any point in hiding it.'

'People don't always dig up treasure when they've buried it. Think of all the jewels they buried with those Egyptian queens in the Pyramids.'

'You couldn't start digging up graves,' said Fanny, 'it wouldn't be religious.'

'I'm afraid that people sometimes do. Anyway, I know they put coins and newspapers and clothes under foundation-stones . . .'

'That's the sort of thing we ought to bury under the foundations of the nursery,' decided Memy. 'Let's think what we've got. We must bury it before Mr Martin comes back.'

'I've got a hairslide,' suggested Fanny, pulling it out of her mousy-coloured hair. 'And I've got an elegant thimble from my workbox.'

'I've got a crochet-hook,' said Memy, 'and my crochet's finished, so we could bury that as well. But what we want is *clothes*. That's the sort of treasure people bury.'

'I'm not going to bury my red velvet dress,' decided

Fanny, promptly. 'It's far too pretty. And I like the blue one. And *all* my pinafores.'

'So do I,' Memy agreed. 'But if we buried one of Maggie's little gloves, the white kid ones, you know, and one of her shoes. . . . They're just here, in the cupboard.'

'And one of Louisa's handkerchieves, you know, the embroidered ones, with "L D" in pink silk on the corner. . . .'

'And a wooden letter from Will's ABC.'

'And a little piece from the dolls' tea-set - just a lid,' said Memy. 'I don't think Caroline would mind. She doesn't play with it much.'

'I'll give you three treasures,' promised Charles. 'A piece of clay pipe, and a penknife, and a real crab shell I kept from Beaumaris. What treasure are we going to bury for Papa and Mama?'

They found a scrap of paper from one of Mrs Dodgson's letters; and Charles tore a tiny piece off a roll of parchment in Mr Dodgson's study. It looked an important roll of parchment, and he felt rather guilty tearing it, but of course treasure had to be something special. Everything was neatly in place when Mr Martin came in.

'We're burying treasure,' Charles explained. 'Would you please not tell anyone, and would you please leave a floorboard loose so that we can find it?'

Mr Martin laughed and wiped some ale from his mouth. 'So you want treasure for finding, do you?' he said. 'Well, that's a tall order, Master Charles. But I promise I won't breathe a word about it.'

'I'll just write a message on a piece of wood, and put it in,' Charles remembered. 'It might be useful.'

'And I'll bury a piece of treasure, too, if you'll let me,' said Mr Martin. 'We must let people know when the floor was laid.'

He took a thick, chewed stump of pencil from his pocket, and wrote, very blackly, on a left-over bit of wood, that on 19 June 1843 he and Mr Sutton had laid the floor. More than a century later, when he and Mr Sutton had long been forgotten, when even Charles had been dead for fifty years, the message and all the nursery treasure were found.



4

1844: Twelve Years Old

The way of life at Croft soon became as familiar to Charles as the way he had lived at Daresbury. Every morning at seven o'clock, his mother would come into his room, in her pink wrap, to draw the curtains and wake him; and when he had washed, and put on his clean white shirt and his blue trousers and jacket, his dark blue socks and his

well-polished black shoes, he would go down to the drawing-room for prayers. When all the family had assembled, the servants would file in.

First came Mrs Andrews, the housekeeper, in her bombazine dress, looking like a fat pincushion on legs. Then came Mary, the parlourmaid, who always waited at table, and Annie, the kitchenmaid, who did things like peeling potatoes and washing up the dishes. Then came Miss Wilson, who was prim and looked after the younger children, and Richards, who drove the carriage and attended to the horses. Last of all came William, the weather-beaten outdoor man who looked after the pigs and hens and cows as well as the garden. He wore rough boots and leggings, and, whatever the weather, he always wore a blue scarf with white spots on it knotted round his brown and scrawny neck. Charles never felt the day had begun till William came puffing in; he was always out of breath, as if he'd overslept and run all the way. William was the children's special friend.

When everyone had assembled, Mr Dodgson would look over the tops of his spectacles and say 'Let us pray,' and they would kneel in a semi-circle round him and say a prayer or two: the Lord's Prayer, a prayer for the Queen and her husband, Prince Albert, and all the Royal Family. Mr Dodgson sometimes added a special prayer, or even gave a short sermon. And then the servants would file out, and the family would go into the dining-room where the long table was laid for breakfast, and Mr Dodgson said grace.

Sometimes Mrs Andrews would send in a huge hot dish of sausages and bacon, which smelt nicer than almost any food Charles knew. Sometimes she would send in a great mound of buttered eggs (after all, there were twelve in the family). Charles's favourite breakfast was a brown, new-

laid egg, soft-boiled with fingers of buttered toast to dip into it. When they had finished the last bit of toast and Mrs Andrews' delicious home-made marmalade, and drunk the last cup of steaming coffee, Mr Dodgson would say grace again, and go into his study with the newspaper. Mrs Dodgson would busy herself about household affairs, and the elder children prepared for lessons.

At nine o'clock, promptly, Mr Dodgson would ring the lesson bell, and the day's work would begin. In some ways, it was hardly like school, for Mrs Dodgson taught the children French and botany, and Mr Dodgson taught them divinity, history, grammar and English literature. He gave Charles special lessons in Greek and Latin and mathematics. After lunch, the children were free to do what they wished, until lesson-time came round from four to five.

They often spent the afternoon in the garden, talking to William. He knew everything that was to be known about the house and garden: after all, he had been working there for more than twenty years. He knew everything, too, about the village and the baths where people came, even from London, to take a course of Croft waters, and cure their rheumatism and gout.

'And believe me, Master Charles,' he said, wagging a brown finger at him, 'we've seen some funny sights, we have, up in the village. You really wouldn't credit some of the curious things that happen if you take a sip of that Croft water.'

'What sort of things?' asked Memy.

William pondered for a minute.

'It just beggars imagination, that's what it does,' he said, looking very thoughtful. 'But take it from me, Miss Memy, what happens when you take the cure is sometimes so peculiar that it needs more than words to describe it.'

'I can describe it,' Charles said, suddenly. 'Did you ever hear the story about the extra bottle of Croft water?'

William paused. Then he shook his head.

'Can't say I did, Master Charles.'

'Shall I tell it to you?'

'That would be a fine idea, Master Charles. Let's all of us go and sit in the harbour, and hear it.'

There was once a fat man [Charles began], who was so very fat he could hardly get himself out of his own front door. He tried not eating cream cakes and jam tarts; he even stopped sucking barley-sugar, which was quite his favourite food of all. But whatever he did, he still remained as enormously fat as ever; when his tailor came, he had to sew three coats together to fit him. At last the fat man called his doctor, and the doctor told him he must come up to Croft, and take the waters. 'If you take them three times a day,' said the doctor, 'after breakfast, lunch, and tea, I can promise you that you'll be thin.'

So the fat man took an open carriage to Croft (he was much too fat to get inside a closed carriage), and there he stayed, at the hotel; and three times every day, after breakfast, lunch and tea, he went down to the baths, and bought a bottle of Croft water, and drank it to the last drop. It was just as the doctor said: he grew so very thin that all his clothes had to be cut in half, and even then they hung like sacks on him. One day he ate a large cream bun—but even the cream bun didn't make him really fat again. The three weeks had passed. His cure was over. And he took a closed carriage back to London.

But as he was a little frightened that perhaps, one day, he might wake up and find himself fat again, he had bought an extra bottle of the famous waters, and he took it home in the carriage.

It took a long time to drive to London, and all the time they drove he was wondering how long the cure would last.

He grew more and more worried, and more and more anxious. He finally decided there was only one way to make sure that he stayed thin for ever.

He drank the extra bottle of Croft water.

And as he drained the final drop, his legs began to swell, his shoes split at the sides, his new plum-coloured coat came apart at the seams; he found himself much fatter than he had ever been before, in all his life. He was so fat that when they reached London, he could not be dragged out of the carriage; the driver had to drive him back to Croft. But no-one there was strong enough to get him out again. He was stuck in his carriage for evermore.

And for all I know you can still see him driving round and round and round.

‘That was a sad story, Master Charles,’ said William.

‘Yes, it was very sad,’ Memy agreed. ‘In fact I think I need a plate of strawberries and cream to cheer me up again.’

*

Charles was always busy inventing. A few days later Memy found him in the kitchen-garden. He was sitting in one of the arbours, fixing wheels to a pair of wooden struts.

‘What *are* you making?’ Memy asked.

‘This is one of the passenger coaches.’

‘But you only have passenger coaches on railway trains.’

‘This *is* a railway train.’

She looked round with astonishment at the wheelbarrow, the barrel and the small trunk on the floor. There were a jar of red paint and a brush on the seat.

‘Where’s the engine?’ she enquired. ‘Railway trains have to have engines.’

‘This is the engine, of course,’ said Charles, nodding at the wheelbarrow. ‘And when I’ve fixed the wheels under-

neath them, the barrel and the trunk will carry passengers.'

'What's the paint for?'

'That's for writing CROFT RAILWAY on the coaches. And on the stations, you know. 'This is a station.'

'But it's just an arbour with a painted roof, and ivy on it, and a seat inside,' protested Memy.

'That's what it looks like to you,' said Charles. 'As a matter of fact it's a station. And a refreshment room as well, you know. Railway passengers have to take refreshments.'

'Do railways have rules, then?' Memy asked. Charles seemed to know all about it.

He put down his struts and wheels.

'Everything has rules,' he said. 'Especially railway trains. How could they work without rules?'

Memy found it hard to answer the question. Charles often asked her questions she found it hard to answer. She changed the conversation.

'What *are* the railway rules, then?'

He took a neatly folded piece of paper out of his pocket, and read them out:

'*Rule I.* All passengers when upset are requested to lie still until picked up, as it is requisite that at least 3 trains should go over them, to entitle them to the attention of the doctor and assistants.'

'I don't see why they need doctors,' said Memy.

'There may always be accidents. *Rule II.* If a passenger comes up to a station after the train has passed the next (i.e. when it is about 100 miles off) he may not run after it but must wait for the next.'

'But how *could* he run a hundred miles?'

'Of course he couldn't, Memy. That's why he has to wait. Don't be so silly. *Rule III.* When a passenger has no money and still wants to go by the train, he must stop at whatever station he happens to be at, and earn money - by

making tea for the station master (who drinks it at all hours of the day and night) and grinding sand for the company (what use they make of it they are not bound to explain).'

'Is that all?' enquired Memy.

'No, I've thought out one or two more rules. One is that the station-master - I'm the station master - must look after the station and supply refreshments.'

'What sort of refreshments?' enquired Memy. She was fond of food.

He took a long look round the kitchen garden.

'Radishes,' he said. 'And strawberries. And apricots, in season.'

'You could always pick the apricots from the trees on the wall, as you passed,' said Memy thoughtfully.

'The next rule,' added Charles, 'is that the stationmaster can put anyone in prison for bad behaviour while a train goes round the garden.'

'I don't see the prison.' Memy looked round nervously.

'I haven't built it yet. That's the next thing to do.'

'Can I help to serve refreshments?' she asked. 'I'd be good at it. I help Mama when she has visitors. Passing sandwiches, and cakes, you know.'

Charles thought a moment.

'I'll have to consider that. I must draw up a list of rules. In the meantime, as the stationmaster-in-chief and ticket-collector, I might find some work for you. You can fetch scissors and paper, and cut out the tickets.'

Memy felt extremely flattered.

'But remember,' he added, 'to mark the price of every ticket, clearly. Passengers must always pay for going on the train.'

Fanny and Memy were always quite happy to follow him. And so, of course, were his other five sisters and three brothers – including the baby, Edwin, when he was born. It was always Charles who made the most exciting inventions.

One day he beckoned Fanny and Memy into his room. They were speechless with surprise. There, on his writing-table, stood a little wooden theatre.

‘It’s the tiniest theatre I’ve ever seen,’ said Fanny.

‘It’s 26½ inches wide,’ Charles explained. ‘It’s 23 inches high and 18 inches deep.’

‘Have you measured it?’ asked Memy.

‘Of course I have. I made it all myself.’

‘Every bit of it?’

‘Every bit,’ said Charles. ‘Except the bits Mr Martin helped me with. And except the gold decoration on the front, and the curtains, and the scenery. But I cut the curtains out.’

He drew the purple curtains aside. And there was a miniature stage, all set for a play. The scene was a ruined castle, like Beaumaris.

‘There’s just been a battle, you see,’ he explained, pointing to the ranks of cardboard soldiers on the battlements. ‘Those are the soldiers who’ve captured the castle – and here’ – he picked up a few more from the table – ‘here are the soldiers who have been defeated.’

‘How do you know they’ve been defeated?’ Memy enquired.

‘That’s what happens at the end of the play. I wrote it myself. It’s called *The Tragedy of King John*.’

Memy gazed at him admiringly. ‘Can we help you to act it?’

‘You can help by cutting out the actors,’ Charles said, kindly. ‘You buy them on sheets of cardboard, you know –

they cost a penny if they're plain, and twopence if they're coloured. And if you like,' he added, 'you can help to stick candle-ends in tin shades to make the footlights. I've made some wooden marionettes, but I'd better work the strings myself.'

*

Mr Dodgson often said, rather proudly, to his wife, that his eldest son took after him. Mr Dodgson took great pleasure in mathematics, and he knew so much Latin that he translated books. From the first he had watched over Charles's education, and even he had been surprised at the results.

But on 27 January 1844, when Charles was exactly twelve, Mr Dodgson spoke to his wife. 'My dear Frances,' he said, 'it is time that Charlie went to a proper school.'

'I hope that in time he will go to Christ Church, just as you did,' replied Mrs Dodgson. 'I should like him to go to your college at Oxford.'

'So indeed should I, my dear. And perhaps one day he may follow me in the the service of the Church.'

'He knows enough Latin and Greek already to make a dictionary,' Mrs Dodgson laughed.

'Indeed he does, my dear. But the important thing is to give him an excellent education. It is wiser to spend my money on his education now, than to leave it to him on my death.'

'Charles!' Mrs Dodgson held up her hands in a gesture of protest.

'Have no fears, my dear. I feel quite well, thanks to the excellent care you take of me. But if, as I hope, our son is to enter Christ Church, he must be prepared for the university. I have been making some enquiries. I think we ought to sent him to Richmond School. Dr James Tate

made it famous, and I have every confidence in the present headmaster, his son.'

*

And so, one morning, not long afterwards, the carriage arrived at the front door of Croft Rectory to take Charles away to boarding school for the first time. All the family clustered round the door to say goodbye to him. Fanny gave him a handkerchief she had specially embroidered in silk with his initials, C. L. D. Memy had knitted him a bright blue muffler, with yellow stripes, and she lent him the fossil-stone with the curly fern across it (this was very kind of her because it was her favourite treasure). Caroline and Mary Charlotte had saved their pocket-money for several weeks to buy him a special book for pressing flowers in, and Skeff gave him his best red pencil, so he could write down stories. Mrs Andrews bustled up from the kitchen with a parcel all done up in brown paper and string: a big rich plum cake she had baked for him. Mrs Dodgson gave him a Bible, with gold edges on the pages. Charles felt very important indeed.

Mr Dodgson, a large, imposing figure in clerical black, was to make the journey with him.

'I shall not be back until this evening,' he said to his wife. 'It is nine miles to Richmond and nine miles back, I must speak to Mr Tate, and I have to visit Halnaby, Dalton and Stapleton on my way home.'

'Don't tire yourself, dear,' said Mrs Dodgson, putting her hand on his sleeve.

'I must look after the hamlets in my care,' the Rector said. 'I must justify Sir Robert's trust in me. There is a poor woman in Stapleton who has just lost her husband, and she has six children to support. I must go to her.'

He kissed his wife lightly on the forehead.

'God be with you, dear Frances. And God be with this boy of ours who is leaving home to-day. Into the carriage, Charles.'

Mrs Dodgson bent down and kissed Charles on the top of his head. She smelt faintly of lavender.

'Good-bye, Charlie darling,' she said gently. 'I hope you'll be happy, and good, and try hard at your work. Do remember to wrap up well.'

'I will, Mama,' said Charles.

Then he and Mr Dodgson climbed into the waiting carriage, Richards cracked his whip, and they set off, with a waving of handkerchiefs, on their nine-mile journey.

'It looks like a picture from a history book, Papa,' said Charles, as he caught his first glimpse of Richmond. There, on a perpendicular rock above the winding river Swale, stood the ivy-covered ruins of Richmond Castle, with the majestic great tower, and the huge keep looming over the countryside.

Mr Dodgson nodded. 'A magnificent prospect,' he said. 'A fine example of Norman fortification. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished! No-one inhabits the castle now – the only living creatures are the sheep which graze on the herbage within its walls.'

The castle drew nearer. They clattered over a bridge, and into the clean, steep, cobbled streets of the town.

'You are quite right, Charles,' said Mr Dodgson. 'Every corner is a picture. Just look at those carved gable-ends on the houses, and the great bow-windows with leaded panes.'

'Is the Grammar School very old?' asked Charles.

'It was founded nearly two hundred years ago,' his father said, 'in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. And it is more than an old school, Charlie. It has long been ranked as one of the finest schools of classical learning in England.'

Richmond School is famous for the many finished scholars and good men it has sent into the world. And there it is. You can see it by the church, and the Friary Tower. You and I have come to the end of our journey.'

*

The Reverend James Tate was a small, fat man, with round, gleaming spectacles and a kindly smile. He was the son of the fine headmaster who had ruled Richmond School for thirty-seven years. Eleven years ago, old Dr Tate had become a canon of St Paul's Cathedral in London, and his son had taken on the hard task of succeeding him. But he was so talented, and so pleasant in his manner, that he had already established himself as a worthy successor. He was about Mr Dodgson's age, but he looked much older. He seemed to be kindness in person, and the moment he shook hands with his new pupil in his book-lined study, Charles decided he had found a friend. Indeed, he found a whole family of them, for Mrs Tate and all the eight Tate children were friendly, too. When he wrote home to Fanny and Memy, he told them he had made friends as well with Bertram, Harry and Dick Wilson, and two Robinsons.

All the same it wasn't easy to be away from home for the first time. Fanny and Memy never dreamed of playing tricks on him; boys were not so kind at boarding-school.

One morning, when the bell rang for break, a big red-haired boy with freckles came up to him.

'Come and play in the churchyard, Dodgson. Come and play King of the Cobblers. Will you be king?'

Everyone wanted him to be king. He felt very pleased. They all ran out into the churchyard, and found a smooth green space among the stones.

'There's your throne, Dodgson,' someone said. 'Sit on it.' Charles sat down, and they formed a circle round him. 'Now say "Go to work".'

'Go to work,' said Charles.

And before he could get to his feet, everyone there had set on him, kicking, biting and punching. He fought them off with his fists: he was strong from scrambling in the marlpits at Daresbury, and climbing trees at Croft. He gave them a good many bruises.

'That's enough,' someone said at last. 'Let's play Peter, the Red Lion, instead. Have you any chalk, Dodgson?'

Charles found a stub of yellow chalk in his jacket pocket. They made a mark on a tombstone.

'Shut your eyes, now, Bertram,' ordered the boy with the freckles. Bertram shut his eyes. 'Now touch the mark.'

Bertram set out gingerly, feeling his way across the mossy stones.

'Now your turn, Dodgson.'

Charles made a picture of the gravestone in his mind. He shut his eyes; he knew he could touch the mark. He went forward eagerly. The next minute he had his finger bitten: the boy with the freckles had been standing in front of the tombstone, with his mouth wide open.

But Charles was not a boy to be bullied: he was as tough as any, and the others soon stopped teasing him. And when they played leapfrog or football, or fought or wrestled together, he soon showed that he must be respected.

*

'Well, Dodgson,' Mr Tate announced one fine spring afternoon, 'you have excelled yourself at mathematics. I am taking a few boys to see the Castle. Perhaps you would care to join us?'

'I should certainly like to come, Sir.'

'Then I'll expect you at the front door in ten minutes' time,' Mr Tate continued, 'and we shall proceed on our expedition.'

Ever since he had come to Richmond, Charles had longed to visit the awe-inspiring ruins on their rock. He hastily combed his hair, washed his hands, and made his way to the front door, where he found Bertram and the two Robinsons. Mr Tate himself was there, his eyes were twinkling behind his spectacles; he was holding a small green guide-book in his hand.

'Let me give you a brief history lesson,' Mr Tate began, as they picked their way up the steep Richmond streets. 'This part of Yorkshire was once called Richmondshire. It belonged to a great Saxon nobleman called Earl Edwin of Mercia. When William the Conqueror came over – you remember the date, I trust, Bertram?'

'1066 A.D., Sir.'

'Excellent. When William the Conqueror came over, he bestowed the whole estate on one of his favourites, Alan Rufus, a son of Eudo, Earl of Bretagne. But Earl Edwin was popular in Richmondshire. Alan Rufus had to fight Edwin's supporters to keep his property. And so, in the middle of the Earldom, he chose this great perpendicular rock on the banks of the river Swale. No one could undermine it; and he lavished all his resources on it, and practised all the skill of Norman fortification upon it. In about 1100 A.D., the mighty fortress was finished at last.'

'Were there ever battles here?' asked Bertram.

'Yes,' Mr Tate replied, 'and time and warfare brought the vast castle of Alan Rufus into ruins. But, as you see, the great tower has been restored to its former state.'

'It is a noble setting for a castle, Sir,' said Charles.

'Very fine,' agreed Mr Tate. 'And as we walk round the

edifice, you will see a whole succession of delightful views. Here is the majestic keep of the castle; there the woods hang rich and dark above the winding river. And if you follow the river round the hill, you will find it falls near the Castle Mill in a natural cascade. Yes, Dodgson, we are certainly in a romantic spot.'

It seemed the most romantic place that Charles had ever known: far more romantic even than Beaumaris. The thought of Robin Hood's Tower filled his mind with visions of the adventurer in Lincoln green. He imagined the Sherwood Foresters arriving at dead of night, and scaling the walls, and overcoming the sleepy sentinels, and carrying off untold treasure to divide among the poor. He would have liked to join the band, and give to those in need. So indeed, he was sure, would his father. He could almost imagine the Rector of Croft, in a tunic of Lincoln green, talking to Friar Tuck, and helping to shoulder the sacks of gold for the needy. Did they load it on barges, he wondered, like the barges he had seen at Daresbury, and take it down the rocky, broken river?

'Dreaming of Robin Hood, are you, Dodgson?' Mr Tate enquired.

Charles came out of his reverie with a start.

'Yes, Sir, I was wondering if Robin Hood ever came here in search of treasure.'

'They have certainly found treasure here,' Mr Tate replied, polishing his spectacles with vigour. He put them on again. 'Ah yes, that's better! Dodgson, do you see the remains of that other tower? Most people call it "the Gold Hole," for not so long ago an antiquary found a hoard of money buried there. Let's go and see the one apartment that remains.'

They followed him eagerly to the dark room with its low arched doorway.

'Where does the door lead to, Sir?' asked Charles.

'Let me consult my *Guide to Richmond*,' answered his headmaster. 'It says that this is supposed to be the entrance to an underground passage.'

'Where did the passage go to, Sir?'

'It passed beneath the river to St Martin's Priory, about a quarter of a mile away. A few years ago, some antiquaries made a careful excavation in the tower. They discovered a long arched passage leading into a vaulted apartment. But they could go no further because huge masses of wall had fallen and filled up the greater part of the vault.'

Charles was hot with excitement; he felt his heart thumping away.

'Has anyone else been down the passage, Sir?'

'It may interest you, Dodgson, to know that in 1610 the famous geographer, Speed, drew a plan of Richmond. He described an opening in the Earl's Orchard, a large field south of the Castle. He said it was the entrance to a vault that went under the river, and up into the Castle itself. Alas, there are no traces of this opening to-day.'

They made their way slowly down the hill, and back to the school. Charles had no sleep that night, for thinking of the passage into the garden. He had dreamed about the tunnels in the marlpits at Daresbury, and the passages in Beaumaris Castle. But he knew that this long, dark passage at Richmond, underneath the angry river, opening into the orchard full of sun, was the one and only way to Wonderland.

*

And so, when he was not doing lessons, and the day was fine, he would often sit on a tombstone in the old cemetery outside the school, and read about Edwin, Earl of Mercia, and how he was killed at last in flight to Scotland; he

would read about Alan Rufus, and Alan Niger who succeeded him. He would imagine the days when the Earls of Richmond lived in Richmond Castle, and married the daughters of the king, and lived like kings themselves, with their great household officers, the Seneschal and Bailiff, the Steward and the Chamberlain, and, of course, the constable and the guard who were always ready to defend the castle in case of battle, and to shoot down arrows, darts and stones upon the enemy. He read how King Arthur and his Court were said to sleep a long enchanted sleep in a cave beneath the Castle, and how, if England needed them, the long enchanted sleep would break, and they would do glorious deeds as of old.

One afternoon, when he was sitting reading, in the sun, he was suddenly interrupted.

'You've been sitting there so long,' said Bertram, 'why don't you come and see the church instead?'

Charles had been inside St Mary's every Sunday morning and evening, but somehow he had never noticed the strange, grotesque carvings of people by the windows.

'What do you think of them?' Bertram asked.

'They look all out of shape. Look at that enormous nose, and that man with huge great cheeks like balloons!'

'And look at the windows,' Bertram whispered, 'they are even stranger. Mr Tate said the glass was broken hundreds of years ago, and someone mended it and got the pieces all mixed up.'

They looked at the curious jumbled glass, red and pink and blue.

'It's just like a puzzle,' pondered Charles. 'All those arms and legs and bits of writing. And whose head is that, at the very top?'

Just think of a head without a body, floating in the air! It was like one of Mr Dodgson's inventions.

They came out of the church and looked round at the view from the churchyard, the hills with their lofty wooded heights, the peaceful grazing cattle, the winding river, and the evening sun shedding rose-pink light over it all. A cat came and brushed itself, like velvet, on Charles's leg. He bent down and stroked it gently. It purred and seemed to smile.

A bell rang, long and loudly.

'Time to go in. I'll be first!' shouted Bertram. 'Fancy a cat's head floating in the air!'

And they dashed down the path to the school.

*

Mr Dodgson stretched himself out in his chair in the rectory study.

'My dear Frances,' he said to his wife, 'I have just received the first report on Charles from Richmond School.'

'Are you satisfied with it, my love? I have always had such hopes for Charlie. . . .'

Mr Dodgson lit his clay pipe and drew on it; then he puffed away contentedly.

'I am not merely satisfied,' he said, 'I may say I am distinctly gratified. All the mathematics and Greek and Latin I have taught him have been well worth while.'

'I hope he is also given a good character,' ventured Mrs Dodgson.

The Rector smiled. 'My dear Frances, we could hardly hope for better. Mr Tate declares that Charlie has "a very uncommon share of genius". He finds him gentle and cheerful, playful and ready for conversation, and "capable of acquirements and knowledge far beyond his years".'

'We should indeed be thankful, my love.'

'But there is more, my dear. Our son appears to be a

logician and mathematician. Mr Tate declares that "his reason is so clear and so jealous of error, that he will not rest satisfied without a most exact solution of whatever appears to him obscure. He has passed an excellent examination in mathematics." "

'Surely,' Mrs Dodgson said, 'our son must have some faults?'

The Rector laughed.

'His faults appear to be very few. They seem to lie in his originality. Mr Tate declares that Charlie is marvellously ingenious in replacing the usual inflexions of nouns and verbs by forms of his own devising.'

'He will grow out of that in time.'

'He will indeed grow out of such childish inventions. And, if Mr Tate is right, he will have a bright career. But, my dear' – and Mr Dodgson put down his pipe, and laid his hand on his wife's sleeve – 'my dear, we must take Mr Tate's prudent advice. Charlie must never know that he is superior to other boys. He must learn to love excellence for its own sake.'

Charles was to look back happily on his years at Richmond School: the years when he enjoyed his work and began to write his fantasies. He had many friends; he was devoted to the kindly Mr Tate.

And Mr Tate returned his admiration. When Charles at last left Richmond, Mr Tate wrote to Mr Dodgson: 'I shall always feel a peculiar interest in the gentle, intelligent and well-conducted boy who is now leaving us.'



5

1845: Thirteen Years Old

There seemed no end to Charles's plans and inventions. In his holidays from Richmond he had written a comic ballad opera called *La Guida di Bragia* (which, he said, was Italian for *Bradshaw's Railway Guide*). It was all about railways and railway trains, and the children loved acting it. He promised to make Memy a tool-chest, only twice the size of a postage stamp, and to make her tiny tools to go

inside it. She chose the tools herself: a mallet, a plane and a gimlet, a saw, two braces, a screw-driver and a chisel. Fanny and Memy were his closest friends; it was Memy who suggested that he dressed up one day in a brown wig and a long white robe, and did conjuring tricks. He produced biscuits out of a hat, and made handkerchiefs disappear, and his conjuring filled them with amazement.

'There's only one thing we haven't done,' said Fanny one afternoon. 'We haven't edited a magazine. Everybody's publishing magazines.'

They were sitting under the yew tree – 'the umbrella tree', they called it – at the side of the rectory.

'Then let's start a magazine,' said Charles. A poetry magazine. Just for the family.'

'Poetry has to teach us something,' Fanny pointed out. 'Papa says that poetry should always be instructive.'

'*Useful and Instructive Poetry*,' decided Charles. 'That's the name of the magazine. I'll start thinking of a poem now.'

'It must be the sort of poem that tells you what to do,' insisted Fanny. 'And what not to do.' She glanced down at her pinafore. 'Like losing buttons,' she said.

'And eating toffee,' added Charles, 'like the time Memy got that dreadful toothache.'

'It must tell you not to be lazy and stay in bed when it's time to get up,' said Fanny. 'We ought to call the poem *Rules and Regulations*.'

And so they did. They made it up together:

Learn well your grammar,
And never stammer,
Write well and neatly,
And sing most sweetly,
Be enterprising,
Love early rising,

Go walks of six miles,
Have ready quick smiles,
With lightsome laughter,
Soft flowing after.
Drink tea, not coffee;
Never eat toffy.
Eat bread with butter.
Once more, don't stutter . . .
Lose not a button.
Refuse cold mutton.
Starve your canaries.
Believe in fairies . . .

'I'd like to write a fairy-tale some day,' said Charles. 'I was telling one to Will and Louisa yesterday.'

'Will told me about it,' said Fanny. 'He said it was all about mushrooms that spoke.'

'It was quite a good story,' said Charles, 'But perhaps it wasn't grown-up enough for you.'

'I'd like to hear it all the same.'

Charles was very pleased. 'Would you really? Well, I'll see if I can remember it exactly.'

So Fanny settled down in the most comfortable position, with her hands clasped round her knees, and Charles began:

THE STORY OF LITTLE WILL AND THE MUSHROOM

There was once a little boy called Will, who was growing rather tired of playing in the garden by himself. He was bored with his hoop and ball, he'd read his story book from cover to cover, until he almost knew the words by heart. At last he called his sister Louisa, and told her it was time that they went in search of adventure. Louisa put on her stout shoes for walking, and took her new red cape, in case the weather changed on the way, and they slipped out through the garden gate.

'Their mother must have been very worried,' Fanny pointed out.

'Of course they were careful,' added Charles, 'to leave a note to say they were only going into the field at the bottom of the garden. They would certainly be back in time for tea.'

'But they couldn't have an adventure in a silly field!'

'As a matter of fact,' continued Charles, 'the very strangest thing happened only just outside the garden. They saw a line of big white mushrooms right across the field. They grew in a straight line, as straight as a ruler.'

'Did Will and Louisa follow the line?'

'Yes, of course they did. They felt it must be leading somewhere special.'

There were seventy-seven mushrooms. When they reached the last, they found themselves by a hedge.

'Well!' cried Louisa, 'this is too vexing! I declare there's no adventure here. Let us pick all the mushrooms for our supper.'

'What a good idea!' cried Will. 'We can carry them home in your cape.' And he bent down to pick the last and biggest mushroom of all.

'How dare you pick me!' said a voice. 'Leave me alone this minute!'

'Did you speak, Will?' enquired Louisa.

'No,' said Will. 'Did you say something to me?'

'Indeed she didn't,' replied the voice, quite sternly, 'I spoke to you.'

And there was the mushroom, quivering with indignation.

'I heard every word you said,' it went on, 'and if you really think I want to be carried home in a cape, you're *quite* mistaken. What would you do with me?'

Louisa looked very hard at Will, but, alas, she was too late.

'We'd fry you in butter, and eat you,' said Will. 'Mushrooms taste delicious.'

'How *could* he say such a thing?' asked Fanny.

That was what Louisa thought. But the words were out. And the mushroom was simply shaking with rage and fury.

'But you *do* pick mushrooms, and eat them,' said Will.

'Not magic ones,' snapped the mushroom. 'Can't you tell the difference when you see it?'

'I'm afraid I can't,' said Will, rather nervously. He had never heard mushrooms speaking before.

'Well,' said the mushroom, 'let me tell you, so that you don't make the same mistake again. The seventy-seventh mushroom is always magic. It can talk. It can also see, because it has invisible eyes. It can also think; and what it thinks about people who want to pick it is nobody's business. So just remember, next time you think of picking mushrooms for supper, that the seventy-seventh one must be left alone.'

'But just suppose I forgot,' said Will, 'or made a mistake in arithmetic, and thought you were only the seventy-sixth?'

'There's one quick answer to that,' snapped the mushroom. 'I'd have to use some magic, and disappear.'

And, with those words, it did.

'Did they pick the other mushrooms?' asked Fanny.

'They didn't after that. They went straight home to their mother, and had tea.'

'Is that all?' asked Fanny.

'I think I did leave out a bit. There were funny insects in it, too. There were snapdragon flies with wings made of holly leaves. There were also bread-and-butter flies that lived on weak tea with cream in it.'

'You should write a book about funny animals,' Fanny decided. 'Have you seen the book Papa has in his study?'

Charles shook his head.

'You wait here,' said Fanny. 'I'll show you what I mean.'

She got up and brushed the grass off her brown holland pinafore; then she walked demurely into the house. Mr

Dodgson didn't like people running into his study when he was busy working. A few minutes later she came back, with her pinafore pockets bulging. She was carrying a big book with a brown cover.

'What have you got in your pockets?' asked Charles.

'An apple for each of us. Then we can settle down and have a read.'

The apples were firm and sweet. They munched away happily.

'This is a special book,' Fanny explained, 'and it's got good pictures in it, too. It's all about animals, but you wouldn't guess: it's called *A General History of Quadrupeds*.'

'Quadrupeds are animals with four feet,' Charles explained. 'The word comes from the Latin. Anyway, let's read about buffaloes.'

The Buffalo [read Fanny, in a rather frightened voice], is found in a wild state in many parts of Africa and India. . . . He frequently rushes from behind a thicket upon some unwary passenger; and, having thrown him down, tramples him to death with his feet and knees, tearing him with his horns and teeth, and licking him with his rough tongue, till the skin is nearly stripped from the body. . . .

'Let's read about something nicer, Fanny. Is there anything about the dormouse?'

Fanny turned the pages rapidly.

'Yes, she said. 'The lesser dormouse. Here's a picture: it says it's tawny red, with full black eyes, and it makes its nest with moss, in the hollow of a tree.'

'It goes to sleep all the winter, you know.'

'Yes, it says here it drowzes away in its nest. Sometimes, if the sun comes out, it wakes up and eats nuts and acorns; but then it drowzes off to sleep again. And look!' cried

Fanny, flicking an apple pip from the pages. She pointed to a picture of a huge fat animal with a tiny head and two long tusks. 'This is the walrus, or sea-horse. It's sometimes ten feet round. You find it in the northern seas, sleeping on islands of ice.'

'It looks very fierce.'

'Yes, it says that it will attack a boat, and try to sink it by striking its great teeth into the sides. It must have strong tusks' she added, 'it uses them as hooks when it climbs the ice. It feeds on sea-weeds and shellfish. . . .'

Mrs Dodgson appeared at the rectory door.

'Fanny! Fanny!' she cried. 'Would you come and help me?'

'Yes, Mama!' Fanny pushed the book into Charles's lap. 'I must go now,' she explained. 'I promised to take Louisa and Maggie for a walk to the village.'

She went back into the rectory. A few minutes later, Charles saw her come out holding a little sister by each hand. There was Louisa, in blue, with her tousled fair hair tied up under her bonnet, and Maggie, who had mouse-coloured hair and a bright pink dress. He watched them as they walked down the drive and out of the rectory gates. Then he turned back to the book on quadrupeds, with the fine engravings by Thomas Bewick. It was one of his favourite books already; and he felt that Fanny was right: one day he must invent a tale about the animals in it.

*

Charles was too grown-up, nowadays, to enjoy the train in the kitchen garden; he was inventing new games for his sisters. He was thinking of a game of circular billiards, for two players, and a new kind of croquet.

'But I like playing croquet as it is,' protested Memy.

'You always play it the same way,' Charles explained. 'It's dull. Now if the balls were live hedgehogs . . .'

'Charlie!'

'And the mallets were live flamingoes, and people had to bend over double, and stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches . . .'

'Just think how their arms and legs would ache!'

'That's what I thought,' said Charles. 'So I'm working out a game called Croquet Castles. It's more like ordinary croquet. You have an arch and a flag for a castle, and one ball for defence and one for attack . . .'

'You never do things the ordinary way,' Memy said, admiringly.

'It's so boring if you do. Let's go for a walk in the wood, and see what we can find there.'

When Memy wandered through the wood at Croft with her other brothers and sisters, it seemed an ordinary wood like any other. When she went with Charles, it was always different. The wood was full of wild creatures like the ones at Daresbury. You knew they were there when you heard a sudden rustling in the leaves, and a crackling and a scamper in the twigs.

'There's a squirrel!' whispered Charles. They stood absolutely still. The squirrel paused, and slowly made its way down the tree to the thick, springy leaf-mould on the ground. Charles and Memy held their breath. The squirrel looked at them for a moment or two with its wise, brown, shiny eyes. Then it scampered up within a few inches of them. Charles bent down and offered it an acorn. The squirrel nibbled it thoughtfully, and looked at them again, as if it was committing them to memory. Then, with a twitch of its bushy tail, it bustled up the tree and watched them from the branches.

'I wonder if it's taken some of the acorn back for its friends?' said Memy.

'It's probably having a tea-party now,' said Charles.

'How do you know? It's gone away, and you can't see it.'

'I can imagine it on the very top branch, sitting down with all its squirrel friends in a long, long row. They're drinking tea out of acorn cups and nibbling nuts. . . . And the birds are gossiping in their nests, and talking about you and me, and admiring your red dress. . . .'

'Do you really think so?'

'I know they are,' said Charles. 'And under the roots of the tree and inside the trunk there are hundreds of other busy creatures. I've watched lizards and snails and ants at play, I've seen rabbits come up to me when I've been lying in the fields: they've lifted up their long ears, and stared, and scurried out of sight, as if they'd suddenly remembered they had an important appointment to keep. . . .'

'Perhaps they had,' Memy agreed. 'I wonder who it was they were going to see.'

'It must have been a duchess at least, they always looked so anxious.'

'Just think of a rabbit visiting a duchess. . . .'

'And all dressed up with a gold watch and chain and white gloves,' added Charles.

'Like the glove we buried,' said Memy. 'Do you remember?'

'Of course I do. It was a white kid glove. Exactly like the ones the rabbits wore.'

*

Charles told Fanny tales about every different flower in the garden, as if they had been real people.

'But I don't make the stories up,' he explained. 'I just repeat conversations. Flowers talk, if you only know how to listen.'

Fanny never knew where his nonsense began and ended, but when he talked like this it seemed so sensible that she forgot it was nonsense altogether.

'Of course flowers can talk,' he went on, 'when there's anybody worth talking to. But they just don't think it's manners for them to begin.'

'Are flowers shy?'

'Yes, some of them are. The violets keep their heads underneath the leaves. They sleep away till they know no more what's going on in the world, than if they were buds. As for the pinks, they're small and rather humble. They think they're poor relations of the carnations. The roses look down on them: after all, the rose is the queen of the garden. As for the larkspur . . .'

'The larkspur's taller.'

'Yes, but she doesn't come of such good family. You don't find her, you know, on coats-of-arms. The tiger-lilies are proud and haughty, the daisies are terrible gossips, they chatter away without stopping, all the time. . . . Fanny, you're not listening!'

'I *am*.'

'I know you're not. You've got that dreamy sort of look on your face. I know quite well you're thinking of something else.'

'All right, I *am*. You don't know what is is.'

'I do. You're thinking of Hell Kettles.'

Fanny started. 'How did you guess?'

'I said I'd take you there this afternoon; and I saw you looking that way over the fields.'

'I'll go in and brush my hair,' said Fanny, 'and put on my clean pinafore, just in case we meet someone on the

way. And I'll change my shoes. You'd better, too, if we're going across the fields.'

They put on thicker shoes for walking, and went out into the sunny little village. Croft was a very busy place because it was a spa. People had been coming there to take the waters for more than a hundred years, and there were so many visitors that the New Baths had been opened not long ago.

They passed old, bent, rheumaticky women, hobbling from the hotel, and tottering along to take the cure; they walked on crutches, and you could see their hands were all wrinkled and knobbly. Some of them wore flashing rings on their fingers, but what was the use of rubies and sapphires, asked Fanny, if you felt all bruised and achey every time you moved? They saw one old man being driven to the New Baths in a carriage; he wore a purple frock coat and a high white stock, and a grey top hat, a little to one side. But what was the use of elegant clothes and a shiny carriage, Fanny wondered, if you were as fat as the man in Charles's story?

'Poor things,' she said, 'with all their dreadful rheumatism and gout: it's lucky that Croft waters seem to cure them.'

'It's funny they don't drink out of Hell Kettles,' added Charles, as they left the village behind them, and picked their way across a marshy field. 'It's the same kind of water in them.'

'People are frightened of the Kettles,' Fanny said. 'Just think of them: there they are, those three big pools in that lonely, marshy place. And no-one knows what's at the bottom of them.'

Fanny had been reading how, very many years ago, there had suddenly been a terrible roaring sound, and the ground had erupted like a volcano. It had risen up higher

than the church tower; and suddenly, at sunset, it had fallen down with such a crash that it had frightened everyone out of their wits. And then the earth had swallowed it up and it had left these three deep pits behind.

'I'm frightened of them myself,' said Fanny. 'That's why I wanted you to come with me.'

She gripped Charles's hand as they peered down into the dark, murky pools.

'Well, I'm not frightened,' he reassured her.

'But they look so thick and black.'

'So does black treacle,' said her brother. 'They may be treacle wells. Of course they are – and that explains everything.'

'Explains what?'

'All about Hell Kettles. They're simply full of treacle.'

'Nonsense, Charlie!'

'It isn't nonsense. I'll tell you why.'

And as they stood and stared at Hell Kettles, Charles told Fanny

THE TALE OF THE TREACLE WELLS

Once upon a time [he began], there were three little sisters, and their names were Elsie, Lacie and Tillie; and they lived at the bottom of a well. . . . They didn't drown, because the well happened to be dry. They were very comfortable, down there; there wasn't a breath of wind, and they just covered up the top of the well with leaves and twigs and rushes when it looked like coming on to rain. They used to climb out and buy their food at the village stores, and cook it in the well.

'How did they get in?' asked Fanny.

'Don't interrupt so much,' answered Charles.

They got in easily. They had fixed a rope ladder down the

side. They used to sit there, baking hot potatoes in the fire, and cooking stews with lots and lots of dumplings, and making mince, and steaming delicious puddings.

‘With currants in?’ asked Fanny. She was always interested in questions of food and drink. She couldn’t help interrupting again.

No, they didn’t like currants, or jam roly-poly. They couldn’t abide apple duff. Their favourite pudding was steamed pudding with treacle. They began by eating it on birthdays, but that only meant that they could eat it three times a year. Then they decided to eat it on Christmas Day and at Easter, but that only brought the total up to five. At last, when Elsie grew quite thin and pale from dreaming of treacle pudding, and Lacie was bad-tempered because there were three months to wait till next time, Tillie said: ‘There’s only one way for us to be happy for ever. We ought to eat treacle pudding every day.’ At this they all broke into cheers, they cheered so long and loud that lots of loose pieces of earth fell off the walls. ‘What an excellent idea!’ whispered Elsie, who was faint with excitement. ‘The only thing is, where do we put the treacle?’ ‘We’ll have to dig a special well to put it in,’ said Lacie. ‘I’ll set to work at once.’ She dug for twenty days and twenty nights, and they filled the well with black treacle, up to the brim.

‘They must have got tired of treacle pudding then,’ suggested Fanny.

The trouble was they wanted more. They quarrelled bitterly, for Lacie said the treacle well was hers, because she’d dug it. Elsie and Tille said it was theirs, because they’d spent all their savings on the treacle. Matters got to such a pitch that they all grew quite thin and pale again. At last they called another conference. They argued all day long; they would

have argued all the night if Tillie hadn't said: 'There ought to be a well for each of us.' They cheered again. 'Then let's dig one more well!' they cried together, 'and fill all three with treacle!' They took their baskets, and scrambled up the ladder to the surface, and ran off as fast as their legs would take them. They ran to the village shop, where they bought every jar of treacle they could find. They dug a third well; they filled all the wells with treacle up to the top. And then, each stood beside her well, and took a deep dive in.

'And are they still there, do you think?' asked Fanny.

'Yes, for all I know, they are still living down in the depths of Hell Kettles to-day.'

*

Charles made everything seem more exciting, more like an adventure, a sort of dream. When Fanny let herself into the greenhouse in the rectory garden, where all the different cactuses were kept, she just saw dozens and dozens of plants which looked like green rubber with prickles. Some were fluted, some were flat, some were round and other ones were straight. But she couldn't ever have told you which was which.

'But you ought to know, Fanny,' insisted Charles, coming into the greenhouse one morning. 'You see that tall cactus over there? It's a night-blowing cereus.'

'Why is it called a cereus?'

'Because it belongs to the cereus family, and you can find it in the southern West Indies, and South America.'

'And why is it called night-blowing?'

'Because it blooms in the night and dies the moment the sun comes up in the morning.'

'But flowers always open in the day,' said Fanny, 'and close up at night. Think of marigolds.'

'That's why this is a special cactus. It's so rare that when

it looks like blooming Papa is letting us stay up and see it. And that's a peanut cactus, and this is an elephant's ear. You wouldn't understand the Latin names. And here's a caterpillar cactus, and here's a grizzly bear.' He walked slowly down the greenhouse, pointing them out. 'There,' he said at last, 'there's a night-blooming hedgehog.'

'It doesn't look like a hedgehog to me.'

'Well, it's got prickles on. Hedgehogs have big prickles. So it must be a hedgehog, mustn't it?'

Fanny couldn't think of an answer, anyway not at once.

'What about this tall thin one?' she said.

'That's a candle cactus, of course.'

'Why "of course"?' said Fanny.

'Because it's next to the night-blooming hedgehog. How could the hedgehog see to open in the middle of the night if there wasn't a candle to show the way?'

'Really, Charlie, you're impossible!' cried Fanny. 'You just talk more and more nonsense every day.'

Charles looked at her solemnly. 'It isn't all nonsense,' he replied. 'You'll find that there's a great deal of sense in it.'

*

When Charles made up stories, they always seemed the sort of thing you dreamed in dreams. Castles turned into pools of water, cats and birds and flowers used to talk and behave like real people talked and behaved. But there was always a reason behind it, and, when he explained it, it seemed as sensible as two and two making four.

One day, in Mr Dodgson's study, among the special books, he found a heavy book with a leather binding. It was all about Ripon Cathedral. Mr Dodgson still went to Ripon because he was the chaplain to the Bishop, and he had often told Charles about the Cathedral. This book was

full of engravings of the windows and memorials, and the curious carvings on the stalls. When you turned up the seats of the stalls, you could see fabulous monsters. There were two gryphons fighting: they looked half like lions and half like eagles. They must have been ferocious, thought Charles, because in another carving one of them was devouring a man's leg. Here was an owl, and here was a mermaid. Here was a hog, like the one in the rectory pigsty: it was playing bagpipes, and two other hogs were dancing to the music, and solemnly waving their forepaws to mark the time. There were a dragon and some birds, and two dragons fighting: he could see their flaming eyes and catching claws. What was the reason behind it all? He knew there must be a story; and all that night he lay awake, making up a story for the pictures. He went on dreaming of dancing gryphons, and dragons with flaming eyes, long after he had fallen asleep.

*

'Let's pretend that Skeff and I are knights of old,' Charles suggested to Fanny, one afternoon, 'and that you and Memy are maidens fair, like the ones we read about in history books.'

'But I'm not fair,' protested Memy, 'my hair's all mousy-coloured.'

'Don't be silly. When it says "fair" in history books, it means pretty. If you and Memy borrow some old dresses of Mama's, and put flowers in your hair, you'll look quite fair.'

'What about armour for you and Skeff?'

'We can wear dishcovers for breastplates, and bolsters here and there, in case we get hurt, and we've got wooden swords. So let's pretend you're maidens fair, and we are

knights of old, and have a tournament in the kitchen garden.'

'I'd rather have fireworks,' Fanny said, 'and let off crimson rockets. But we can't do that till Guy Fawkes Day.'

'Why should we wait till November?' asked Charles. 'Let's pretend it's Guy Fawkes Day to-day. . . .'

'Let's have celebrations for whoever wins the tournament,' decided Fanny. 'We can let off all the squibs and rockets we didn't use last time.'

So Charles and Skeff tied dishcovers over their chests, and a cushion here and there, in case of bruises, and all that afternoon they fought a battle. Fanny and Memy put on two of Mrs Dodgson's old dresses, a red one and a blue one, and stuck roses in their hair, and at five o'clock they decided that Charles and Skeff had both won the tournament. So both of them had to have prizes, and Fanny and Memy gave them roses to wear as buttonholes. Then they all stood well back while Charles set off the dozen rockets he had kept from last November; and they watched as the fuses quickly burned, and the rockets whistled into the sky.

'Where does the red light come from?' asked Skeff.

'It's just inside the rocket,' answered Fanny. 'What a silly question!'

'It isn't a silly question at all,' said Charles. 'If you want to know, I'll tell you the whole story. Let's sit down.'

So they all went into one of the arbours in the kitchen garden, and settled down to hear

THE STORY OF THE KING OF THE JEWEL MINES

Once upon a time [said Charles], miles underneath the earth, where they dig up rubies and sapphires and gleaming emeralds for the crowns of kings and queens, there lived an

old gnome-like man with a long white beard. He was the king of all the mines where you find precious stones; he was the richest king in the world. He was so rich that his chairs and tables were made of solid gold, and his clothes of rich brocade encrusted with jewels. You would think he was the happiest man alive. But nothing that his wealth could bring could give him happiness: he had an only daughter, Princess Emerald, the sweetest, fairest girl you could wish to see, and she had simply vanished from his sight.

There were some who said that Princess Emerald was only hiding in the diamond caves, and some who said she had been spirited away by a handsome young man on earth. There was only one point on which they all agreed: they were all perfectly sure that she had been taken away from them for ever. At last the King summoned three of the wisest men in his underground kingdom, and said to them: 'My wealth is useless to me. I would give it all away for the happiness of seeing my dear daughter once again.'

'Did he see her again?' asked Memy, screwing her handkerchief into a tight little ball.

'I hope he did,' said Skeff. 'It was no use just being alone with all his jewels and gold.'

'You are right,' said Charles. 'The story only goes to show that riches by themselves cannot bring you lasting happiness.'

The three wise men asked the king what he was prepared to do to find his daughter. 'I will give all my jewels away,' said the King of the Jewel Mines, 'to the man who brings back my daughter safe and well.' And he issued a proclamation saying this, and the three wise men posted up copies on all the walls of his endless underground kingdom; and they posted others here and there in likely places on earth where they thought his daughter might have been. And it happened that one of the proclamations was posted up in a

little English hamlet, somewhere in Yorkshire, not very far from Croft.

A poor young labourer chanced to read it on his way to work. And when he got home that night, he told his wife about the curious notice he had read. And his wife grew very pale, and wept most bitterly. 'I am the lost princess!' she cried. 'One day, years ago, I found my way out of the gloomy underground kingdom. I found myself on the Yorkshire moors, in the biting cold, and your father and mother took me in. I told them I had lost my way. They thought I must be an orphan. They said they they would keep me till someone came for me. But no-one came for me, and I fell in love with you, and married you, and I never dared to tell you my story, for I never thought you would believe it. And now my father wants me home, and I cannot leave you.'

Memy sniffed loudly, and blew her nose.

'She couldn't leave him,' she said.

She didn't need to leave him. He said at once he would go with her and spend his life in the kingdom underground. They packed all their small possessions, and next morning, when the sun rose, they set out together on their journey. And the King of the Jewel Mines was overjoyed to see them, and he offered his son-in-law all his precious jewels. The young man said he had no need of them. He asked the king if they could be used to please the people on earth, who were sometimes sad. And so the King of the Jewel Mines put all his rubies and emeralds and diamonds into fireworks, and we see them every time it's firework day.

1846: Fourteen Years Old

One day in February 1846, just after his fourteenth birthday, Charles put his last belongings into the black tin trunk with CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON painted on it in white. He locked it carefully, and tied the rope round it three times. Then William shouldered it, and carried it downstairs to the waiting carriage.

It all reminded Charles of the day he had gone to Richmond School. Once again the whole family were standing at the front door to say good-bye to him. But this time he was setting out on a more important journey. He was setting off for his first term at Rugby School. As Mr Dodgson had explained, Rugby was one of the seven great public schools of England. If Charles worked hard at Rugby, he would almost certainly go to Oxford University.

When Mr Dodgson spoke of Oxford, a dreamy smile used to pass across his face; his stern features used to light up with happiness. He always told Charles that Oxford was the loveliest place in the world, a city full of colleges like palaces, and gardens glowing with flowers, and the sound of bells. It was not only an ancient seat of learning, it was wonderland. And it was a wonderland that Charles might enter, too, if only he worked hard enough at school. If only Charles knew he would go there! He hardly liked to think of his disappointment if he failed.

Mrs Dodgson looked at him. He seemed very pale in his new black suit with the stiff white collar. She put her arms round him.

'Don't you worry, Charlie darling. I'm sure that you will do your best; no-one can do more than that. God's blessing go with you!'

She kissed him good-bye, and he climbed into the shiny new closed carriage which smelt of leather. Mr Dodgson climbed in too. Old Richards, the coachman, tucked the thick plaid rug round their knees. Then he clambered on to the box, buttoned his heavy grey cape round his shoulders, put on his thick woollen gloves because the day was bitterly cold, and cracked his whip. They had started on their journey.

'You are going to a famous school, Charlie,' Mr Dodgson said, as the carriage spun through the village of Croft. 'It is also an ancient school: it is four hundred years old. And it is more than old, my boy. Under the great Dr Arnold, it has become a model of its kind. That is why I am sending you to Rugby, and not to Westminster where I was myself.'

'Tell me about Dr Arnold, Papa.'

Mr Dodgson leant back in the padded seat, and stretched out his long legs. Charles noticed he was wearing a new black frock-coat for the occasion. He felt Dr Arnold must have looked very like his father.

'Dr Thomas Arnold,' began Mr Dodgson, 'was an excellent teacher, and a good man. He was a great headmaster. He was the first headmaster to suggest having three terms in the school year. He was the first headmaster to suggest a conference where all headmasters could meet and discuss their problems. He began the sensible system of dividing schools into houses, where each boy could be given proper care. He added subjects to the syllabus. He

taught boys to be men. He made them into scholars and gentlemen.'

'And Christians, Papa?'

'Above all, he made them Christians. When Dr Arnold preached,' Mr Dodgson added, 'the restless boy was held to his pew. When Dr Arnold rose in anger, it was like the wrath of God. But he taught his pupils the more important kind of Christianity: he taught them kindness, moral purpose and trust.'

'Was he a strict man, Papa?'

'Yes, Charles. And certain boys were not strong enough to follow his precepts. Some of them, alas, fell by the wayside. But when Dr Arnold expelled a boy, he always used to explain that Rugby need not be a school of three hundred boys, or of fifty boys, but it must be a school of Christian gentlemen.'

'Papa, could you talk to Dr Arnold like you talked to Mr Tate?'

'Yes, Charlie, he was a father to his pupils. When the flag flew on School House at Rugby it meant he was ready to help all those who needed his advice. And his advice was given with such kindness and understanding that his pupils trusted him and loved him. Dr Arnold was an inspiration.'

Charles pulled his coat-collar up round his neck. 'I am sorry Dr Arnold is not headmaster of Rugby to-day.'

'Alas, he died four years ago,' Mr Dodgson said. 'But I have no doubt his great influence remains. And Dr Tait is a most worthy man to succeed him.'

*

Charles's hopes were running high when at last they passed through the big gates of Rugby School, with the

oriel window above them. There was the great school field, or 'close', with its elm trees, and the long line of grey buildings, beginning with the chapel and ending with the School House. The flag was waving lazily from the highest round tower. Dr Archibald Campbell Tait was in residence. A few minutes later, Mr Dodgson was presenting his son.

Dr Tait was a big man with a heavy, serious face; but he was not as imposing, thought Charles, as Dr Arnold must have been.

'So this is your son,' said Dr Tait to the Rector of Croft. 'I hope he will profit from his study here.'

He looked at Charles for a minute or two, and seemed to be summing him up. And he appeared to be satisfied. He suddenly patted Charles on the shoulder, and added: 'He should make a good Rugby man.'

Then he put on his ample black gown over his frock-coat, and escorted them round the school.

'Have you played football, boy?' he asked, as they passed the broad open field known to Rugbeians as Big Side.

'Yes, Sir. I played it at Richmond.'

'Well, there's a scrimmage for you,' said Dr Tait, nodding towards a seething mass of boys. He stopped a moment, and watched the struggle. 'Ah, well played, Sir, well played! . . . No, run, Sir, run! . . . Forgive me, my dear Mr Dodgson: I was carried away by the fervour of the game. Let us now proceed on our tour of inspection and see the School House hall.'

The hall was thirty feet long and some twenty feet high, with two tables running the length of it, and two fire-places with blazing fires at the side. It led into several long dark passages (like the passages at Beaumaris Castle), and off these passages opened the boys' studies. They seemed cramped and bare and depressing, thought Charles,

as the wintry light filtered through the bars of the one small window.

'These studies are on the ground floor, Sir,' Dr Tait said to Mr Dodgson. 'The bars are a safety measure.'

Charles was thinking how he would improve his study with a coat of fresh white paint, and a cotton curtain across the window. He wanted a sofa with a chintz cover, and a green baize cloth on the table.

'Your son will need a plain candlestick and an extinguisher,' added Dr Tait, 'and a basin and a bottle for washing his hands. When he has given the key of his trunk to the matron, she will supply them.'

*

At last Mr Dodgson said good-bye, and drove off in his carriage. Charles felt very lonely. He sat for a while on his study stool, fingering the two fossils he'd brought from home. He and Memy had dug them out of the marlpits at Daresbury, and they made his surroundings seem less strange. He would have given a great deal at that moment to find himself in the rectory at Croft.

'Fag, get up and black my shoes, and fetch me some hot water!'

Charles started up.

'And put those stones away and stop your dreaming,' said the boy who had just come in. He was a large boy with fair hair; his velvet cap and his jersey and white trousers were covered with wet mud. He had been playing on Big Side.

'Who are you?' asked Charles.

'A praepostor. That means I'm in the sixth form, and you're my fag, and you do what I tell you. Including my Latin excercises.'

'That would be cheating,' said Charles. It seemed quite against the precepts of Dr Arnold.

'Any disobedience,' snapped the praepostor, 'and I'll strip your bed. You wouldn't like to spend a night without blankets. It's very cold in the dormitory, you know.'

'I could report you to Dr Tait.'

'Talebearers are sent to Coventry. I don't think you'd like everyone to ignore you. So black my shoes, Dods-worth, if that's your name, and fetch me a can of hot water. And we expect you to sing in hall to-night.'

Singing in hall was a test for every new boy who came to Rugby. Every new boy stood in turn on one of the long tables, with a candle in each hand, and sang a song. Charles looked down on the sea of faces, all flushed by the fire.

'I can't sing in tune,' he said.

'Sing, sing!' came the chorus.

He couldn't sing. In the second bar he sang two false notes. Everyone hissed, and one of his candles suddenly went out. A bread pellet had hit it. Charles got a crust in the face.

'Sing, sing!' the chorus went on.

He went on singing while they threw crusts and hard bread pellets at him. Then the praepostor collected drips of hot tallow from the candles, and smeared Charles's hands.

'And now drink this!' he said.

He gave him a tankard of salt and water and forced him to drain it. Charles had entered Rugby School.

*

He often escaped to his little room in his three years at the school. Sometimes, on Saturday night, when there wasn't

a lesson to learn for the following morning, he enjoyed a jam tart from the pastrycook's (or 'guttle shop,' as they called it), or toasted sizzling sausages by the fire. But more often he had to write out impositions for the older boys, hundreds and hundreds of lines of Greek and Latin. He did them on pain of a blanketless bed and a sleepless night.

His other escape was to go to tea at Mrs Tait's, which he did about twice a term; and after his study, with its one small window, its shabby furniture, the ink stains on the table, and only the fossils in the drawer to remind him of home, Mrs Tait's house seemed another world. There were so many things to see in her drawing-room: the little baskets of flowers, all made of different coloured shells, standing on black stands under their glass domes; the samplers, where every letter of the alphabet was beautifully worked in silk and Mrs Tait had shown her skill in embroidering patterns and flowers and curious animals. There was a little table made of compressed paper, or *papier mâché*, with a design on top in mother-of-pearl. There were engravings of Mr Landseer's pictures: some showed stags on mountain-tops, and others showed the Queen and Prince Albert surrounded by their children and little dogs. There was always a glass vase of flowers on the mantelpiece: roses in the summer, and dahlias and michaelmas daisies as the autumn drew near. And round the fireplace were arranged a deep and comfortable sofa, covered in dark green plush, and two well-padded arm-chairs.

The first time Charles was invited to tea, he found Mrs Tait sitting sewing in an armchair; she was wearing a plain dark purple dress with a little white collar and a small gold brooch at her neck. Her dark hair was parted in the middle and drawn tightly back in a bun. Her eyes were gay and friendly. She was very young:

she didn't seem much older than Fanny and Memy.

'Do sit down, Dodgson,' said Mrs Tait, putting away her sewing in a blue embroidered bag. 'Will you have some tea?'

'Thank you,' said Charles. He put his hand nervously to his hair. He had spent a long time combing it.

'I like to have my husband's pupils to tea,' said Mrs Tait. She picked up the silver teapot from a tray on the little table beside her. 'And when they are older, I invite them to supper.'

'It is good of you to find time for them,' answered Charles, politely.

'I am certainly a busy woman,' smiled the headmaster's wife, pouring out the tea. 'I have a baby daughter of my own – and I watch over more than three hundred boys in the school. I also keep the school accounts, manage the servants, instruct the maids in religion, and teach a class of little girls at the village school.'

'You must feel tired, Ma'am,' ventured Charles.

'My religion is my strength,' Mrs Tait replied. 'Dr Tait and I owe much to our prayers. We have been entrusted with a great moral responsibility.'

'Yes, indeed, Ma'am,' Charles agreed. He had often noticed Mrs Tait's happy face at matins in the school chapel. She reminded him a little of his mother.

'What is your favourite reading, Dodgson?' Mrs Tait asked, smiling.

'I enjoy reading Latin and Greek, Ma'am, and Macaulay's *History of England*, and the works of Mr Dickens. And Mr Tennyson's poems.'

Mrs Tait nodded her approval. 'You choose your books very wisely. Have you ever written yourself?'

Charles and his friends had often recited Macaulay's poem *Horatius*, from his *Lays of Ancient Rome*. Could

Mrs Tait have guessed that he had written a parody of Macaulay?

'Do you write poetry?' she asked, passing him some cake.

'It is hardly poetry, Ma'am,' said Charles. 'I have written a parody of Macaulay's *Horatius*: it is the story of my brother's adventures with a donkey.'

'I should be delighted to hear it,' Mrs Tait said eagerly.

Charles felt a little nervous; but as the headmaster's wife had folded her hands in her lap and settled down to listen, he had to begin his recitation:

Fair stands the ancient Rectory,
The Rectory of Croft,
The sun shines bright upon it,
The breezes whisper soft.
From all the house and garden
Its inhabitants come forth,
And muster in the road without,
And pace in twos and threes about,
The children of the North.

Some are waiting in the garden,
Some are waiting at the door,
And some are following behind,
And some have gone before.
But wherefore all this mustering?
Wherefore this vast array?
A gallant feat of horsemanship
Will be performed today . . .

'An excellent parody, Dodgson,' said a voice at the door. Dr Tait had just arrived and was standing on the threshold. Charles rose to his feet.

'No, sit down, Dodgson.' Dr Tait made a gesture with his hand. 'My dear Catherine, is there some tea for me?'

'Of course there is, Archibald.' Mrs Tait reached for the silver teapot. Charles noticed how brightly the teapot and the sugar-bowl were gleaming. He had never seen such pretty cups as Mrs Tait's, with their delicate pattern of pink roses.

Dr Tait took his cup of tea and settled himself in one of the big armchairs.

'I'm glad I'm in time,' he observed, with a smile. 'But then, time has often been kind to me.'

'You must tell Dodgson your famous story,' Mrs Tait said, laughing.

'Indeed I must,' replied her husband. 'It is strange to think that if my application had come thirty seconds after it did, I should never have been headmaster of Rugby School.'

Charles looked up puzzled. 'What happened, Sir?'

'When the great Dr Arnold died,' said Dr Tait, stirring his tea, 'and the trustees tried to find a successor, I could not bring myself to apply for the post. It seemed impossible to follow such a fine headmaster. My friends urged me again and again to make the application. "But, gentlemen," I said to them, "I know my hopes are vain. The letter must reach Rugby School by twelve to-morrow morning. If I take pen and paper now, and write my letter to them, it will undoubtedly arrive too late." They promised me that, come what might, it would arrive in time. They hired a horse and hired a messenger. Before the ink was dry upon the envelope, he was galloping to Rugby with all speed. As he knocked on the door to deliver his letter, the clock was beginning to strike . . .'

'But he was in time, my dear,' Mrs Tait interrupted.

'Yes, my love, he was in time,' Dr Tait agreed. 'And a few days later, I learned that I had the honour of being chosen. Dodgson, will you have some more tea?'

'No, thank you, Sir.'

'Another slice of cherry cake?'

'Yes please, Sir.'

It was the most delicious cherry cake that Charles had ever tasted. It was rich with sugar, butter and cherries.

'And a slice for me, if you please, my love,' said Dr Tait with a smile. 'I have an appetite. I've been in school since quarter to seven this morning.'

'Will you be taking a holiday, Sir, after all your work?'

'Mrs Tait and I may take a brief respite later. But we have only recently been to Italy; and now, of course, our infant daughter makes demands on us.'

'Archibald,' said Mrs Tait, putting down her cup of tea, 'I must go upstairs and attend to Catherine. I hope that you and Dodgson will excuse me.'

'Indeed we will,' said Dr Tait. 'But I hope one day this young gentleman will dine with us. In the meanwhile I must prepare a sermon, and no doubt Dodgson needs to return to the study of mathematics.'

*

Charles felt happy as he left Mrs Tait's that evening; the truth was he found life at Rugby rather hard. The praepostors still stripped his bed of blankets if he failed to black their shoes to their satisfaction; the dormitory was often cold, and the boys who shared it with him were rough and noisy. He often felt tired when the ten-minute bell rang in the morning, and there was a general rush to get up and scramble into your clothes and another rush to get into school before the door shut, and you were punished for being late for prayers. Charles worked hard at Rugby, but he didn't enjoy his work as he had done with Mr Tate at Richmond. He had only played cricket once.

They had put him on to bowl, he had bowled one ball and had been taken off. He could still remember how the captain sneered: 'If the ball had gone far enough, Dodgson, it would have been a wide.' He didn't like team games, and no-one at Rugby could understand a boy who enjoyed work more than cricket and football, and was happiest of all inventing stories.

'Good evening, Dodgson.' A cheerful voice broke in upon his thoughts. He looked up to see Mr Smythies, the second mathematics master.

'Good evening, Sir.'

Mr Smythies stood smiling at him, with his hands on the lapels of his gown.

'Dodgson, would you care for a glass of wine?'

'I should be delighted, Sir.'

'Then we'll go across to my house. My wife will be happy to see you, and I should like a little conversation.'

Charles was glad to follow him home and sit by the fire in his study. Mr Smythies was not as good at mathematics as the senior master, Mr Mayor, in fact he knew much less than Mr Dodgson, but Charles still respected him as a clever man and admired his devotion to duty.

Mr Smythies reached for a decanter.

'A glass of madeira, Dodgson?'

'Thank you, Sir.'

'I trust you will like it. I am very fond of madeira. It warms the cockles of the heart on a winter's day. It suffuses a gentle benevolence through the system.'

And indeed it did. By the time he had finished his glass, Charles felt a glow of pleasure and contentment.

'Well, Dodgson,' Mr Smythies continued, 'I suppose you're getting on well with your mathematics?'

'I trust so, Sir.'

'I should like you to know that Mr Mayor and I are

pleased with you. We have not had a more promising boy of your age at Rugby. You have a great mathematical knowledge, Dodgson. What are you going to do with it?’

‘I think that my father would like me to go to his old college at Oxford, Sir.’

‘Which college was that?’

‘Christ Church, Sir, I should like to go. But my father was a brilliant student. He won a double first. I doubt if I should prove myself worthy of him.’

Mr Smythies smiled.

‘I think you would do him the greatest credit,’ he said. ‘It would be an excellent thing to follow him. And then, no doubt, you could follow him and your great-grandfather the Bishop and enter the service of the Church.’

‘I doubt if I could do that, Sir.’

‘Why not, Dodgson?’

‘I find it hard to talk to people, Sir. And when I am nervous, I stammer. I don’t think I should be suited to parochial work, or to preaching.’

‘Perhaps you might write books on religion?’ Mr Smythies asked. ‘I have always thought you deeply religious.’

‘Yes, Sir, I am religious. But I feel that, if I write, I should prefer to write books on mathematics.’

‘You may be wise, Dodgson.’

‘Or even books of fantasy.’

‘Fantasy? Fantasy?’ Mr Smythies put down his glass. ‘How could you write books on fantasy, may I ask?’

Mr Smythies could not understand how so gifted a mathematician, so fine a scholar of Greek and Latin, a boy who would take home a pile of prizes at the end of term, should throw all his learning away, and write fantasies. What would the great Dr Arnold have said to a

Rugby boy who behaved like this? What would Dr Tait think about it all when he heard?

Mr Smythies looked again at the dark-haired, blue-eyed boy who sat on the opposite side of the fire. Charles was gazing into the coals. He was already deep in his dreams.



7

1849: Seventeen Years Old

The winter term of 1849 was over at last. 'Well, Charles,' said Mr Dodgson, as the carriage drove under the great arch, and into the streets of Rugby, 'well, Charles, that is the end of your school career. I am gratified to learn that you have distinguished yourself not only in mathematics, and classical studies, but in your everyday behaviour. I am sure you feel a debt of gratitude to Rugby School.'

Charles was silent for a moment. He admired his father, and he did not want to disappoint him. Yet all he felt on leaving Rugby after three years was a deep sense of relief.

Mr Dodgson looked solemn and questioning.

'Well, Charles,' he asked, 'how do you feel?'

'I am glad I have satisfied you, Papa. It is my greatest wish to please you and my mother. But I am very glad I am not going back to Rugby.'

'That is honest of you, my boy. What fault did you find with the school?'

'I never enjoyed my work,' said Charles, 'I spent too much time writing out impositions . . .'

'And no-one else wrote nonsense verse?' Mr Dodgson interrupted. They looked at one another and burst out laughing.

'No-one else wrote nonsense verse, Papa. No-one understood about the stories and poems in my mind. No-one imagined things like I imagine them with Fanny and Memy.'

'Did you make any friends, my boy?'

'Yes, Papa, I made some friends. But I cannot say I look back with any pleasure. And nothing I can think of,' said Charles, as they left the town behind them, 'would make me go through my three years there again.'

Charles was to stay at Croft while he prepared to go to Oxford. He had had whooping cough very badly. He had also been ill with mumps, and as a result he would always be deaf in one ear. He felt he could work better in the familiar surroundings of the rectory. And after all, his whole career depended, as he knew, on whether or not he went to the university.

'There is nothing more that I can teach you about mathematics,' Mr Dodgson said when they reached home.

'You know much more about algebra, arithmetic and

geometry than I do. But I will gladly teach you what I know about divinity; you have a rare streak of piety in you, Charles, and one day you should make an excellent minister of the Church of England. When you have had a brief rest from your work and recuperated from the rigours of your final term, we shall read divinity together.'

*

It was too cold, yet, to sit and read by the acacia tree on the front lawn; but it was good weather for telling stories. How often Charles had sat alone in his little room at Rugby, wishing he was by the fire at Croft! And how often the other children had sat round the nursery fire, wishing he would come home and tell them tales!

'It's been ages and ages,' said Skeff, one December evening. 'If we make you some toast, will you tell us a story?'

'Of course I will,' Charles answered. There had been so many stories going round and round in his head while he was away that he hardly knew which he should tell first. But he gladly sat down in the deep, plush-covered chair by the fire; and while the yellow butter melted, and soaked into the toast, he told them

THE STORY OF THE TWO MUSICAL BOXES

Two musical boxes once lived side by side on a nursery shelf. One was old and frail. The painted roses on its lid had long begun to fade, the gilt decorations had tarnished, the label inside was so discoloured nobody could read who had made the box, or where it came from. And, sad to say, there was nobody who cared.

'You can only play one tune,' sneered the other musical box with a silver lid. 'I might say *could*, for everyone knows that your works have gone rusty and wrong, and there is no music in you now.'

The shabby musical box cried quietly to itself.

'Poor feeble thing!' said its neighbour. 'You're no use to anyone any more. You couldn't play a tune to save your soul.'

It was quite true that the shabby box had not uttered a single sound since the day when little Edward had thrown it down the stairs in a fit of anger. It could not utter a protest now; it was so unhappy that it nearly burst with misery.

'I don't know why they keep you here,' the silver box continued. 'They could use the space to better purpose. I can play half-a-dozen tunes: three waltzes, and three marches. I am full of life and gaiety. I think I give them pleasure enough.'

At this point the silver box stopped talking. The lady of the house came into the nursery. Her cheeks were wet with tears.

'My poor little boy is ill,' she cried, sinking into a chair, 'and his fever rises every night. If it continues, he will be too weak to recover. What can I do to soothe my little Eddie?'

The silver musical box shook itself and began to play its rapid waltzes and stirring marches. Eddie's mother rose to her feet.

'How can you be so heartless?' she cried. 'Your noisy tunes will make my little boy more feverish than ever.'

The silver box stopped in amazement; then it sat and sulked. Its pride was hurt; it would never play again. But the old box with the faded roses had no time for pride: it loved the little boy, although he had caused it pain. And now it thought that he might die, it shook so hard with sobs that suddenly the wheels inside went round.

And, for the first time for many months, it played its single tune: an old, forgotten, gentle lullaby; and Eddie's mother picked up the faded box and set it by the bedside of her little boy who was so ill.

And the lullaby soothed the little boy and he slept a peaceful sleep and, when he woke, his fever was quite gone. And the musical-box with the silver lid was thrown away for ever, but the box with the faded roses, the musical-box that only played one tune, lived happily in the drawing-room ever after.

'More toast?' said Skeff.

'How could you even *think* of such a thing?' asked Fanny, angrily. 'I declare I'm so upset I couldn't eat.'

*

Charles never stopped inventing stories. In his little room on the top floor of the rectory, he used to sit for hours, writing a magazine for Fanny and Memy and the eight other children in the nursery. Since the day he had started *Useful and Instructive Poetry*, there had been many family magazines; but the best of all was certainly the new one, *The Rectory Umbrella*. Nearly everyone in the family wrote something for it, and every time a new number appeared there was the greatest excitement all through the house.

The magazine was called after Mr Dodgson's umbrella, the big black one in the wooden stand in the hall.

'And I've got another idea,' Charles explained to Memy. 'You know Papa's walking-stick? I think it would make a story that would make your hair stand on end. I've invented it in my head already. I'm calling it *The Walking Stick of Destiny*.'

'What about useful and improving articles?' enquired Fanny. She was always interested in improving her mind.

Charles took a paper out of a pigeon-hole in his desk.

'I knew you would want that,' he said, 'so I've written a zoological paper. It's a true account of the Lory.'

'What's a Lory?' Fanny asked.

'A Lory is a bird. And it's extinct.'

'What's extinct?' asked Memy.

'It means there aren't any more.'

'How can you write about a bird that isn't there any more? You're talking nonsense!'

'No, I'm not,' said Charles. 'And, anyway, stop interrupting, both of you, and listen:

THE LORY

This creature is, we believe, a species of parrot: Southey informs us that it is a 'bird of gorgeous plumery,' and it is our private opinion that there never existed more than one, whose history, as far as is practicable, we will now lay before our readers.

The time and place of the Lory's birth is uncertain: the egg from which it was hatched was most probably, to judge from the colour of the bird, one of those magnificent Easter Eggs which our readers have doubtless often seen; the experiment of hatching an Easter Egg is at any rate worth trying . . .'

'Charles, you're mad!' cried Fanny, laughing. 'How could you invent such a thing?'

'How could I not?' asked Charles. 'And anyway, it's not all invention. I saw a stuffed Lory in the museum at York.'

'And what about poems? We must have poems,' Fanny continued.

'I've written one already. I've called it *Horrors*.'

'Will it frighten me?'

'I'll read it to you,' answered Charles. 'You tell me what you think of it.' And, rummaging in his desk, he pulled out a sheet of lined blue paper and began:

Methought I walked a dismal place
With horrors all around;
The air was thick with many a face,
And black as night the ground.

I saw a monster come with speed,
Its face of grimmliest green . . .

'There's no such word as grimmliest,' said Fanny.

'It's like grim, only more so,' answered Charles. 'Don't interrupt.'

I saw a monster come with speed,
Its face of grimmliest green,
On human beings used to feed,
Most dreadful to be seen.

I could not speak, I could not fly,
I fell down in that place,
I saw the monster's horrid eye,
Come leering in my face!

Amidst my scarcely-stifled groans,
Amidst my moanings deep,
I heard a voice, 'Wake! Mr. Jones,
You're screaming in your sleep!'

'I should have screamed, too,' Fanny said. 'Fancy the grimmliest green!'

*

Charles always liked reading to Fanny and Memy. He was very fond of his brothers, especially the baby, Edwin Heron. (How would Edwin get on at Rugby, he often wondered. Mr Dodgson had already entered the little boy for School House.) All the same, it was Fanny and Memy who understood him best. He was always happiest with girls.

Outside the family there was only one boy he liked to see and this was Vere Bayne. Vere was three years older than he was, and Charles had known him since the Daresbury days. Vere's father, the Reverend Thomas Vere

Bayne, was the headmaster of Warrington Grammar School and he had often come over to help Mr Dodgson with his clerical duties. He had usually brought Vere with him.

And now Vere was doing what Charles hoped to do: he was enjoying his first year at Christ Church.

'I have just had a letter from Vere,' Charles announced one summer day to Memy, as they sprawled out on the lawn. 'He is doing well at Oxford. It makes me so impatient to go there.'

'You must stop fretting,' Memy said. 'Worry never helps you.'

'I'm not worried. I just want to do my best. Unless I go to Oxford, I shan't be fit to write or teach.'

'I didn't know you wanted to teach.'

'Perhaps I may some day.'

'Then why not help me with my class on Tuesday?'

Charles looked bewildered.

'But we all teach at the village school, when we're old enough,' said Memy. 'Come on Tuesday afternoon. You can take your turn. And anyway,' she added, with a twinkle in her eyes, 'I need someone to carry the apples.'

And so, on Tuesday afternoon, bearing a loaded basket of apples in each hand, Charles escorted Memy to the village school in Croft. School was a grand name for it, really. There was only one room, and thirty children were waiting, crowded on the benches. As Charles and Memy came in, they rose.

'Good afternoon, children,' said Memy. She looked very neat and tidy in her plain green dress with its full, umbrella-shaped skirt. She was also very confident, thought Charles.

'Good afternoon, Miss Elizabeth,' said thirty voices in chorus.

'This is my brother, Mr Charles,' Memy went on happily. 'He has brought two baskets of apples – an apple for everyone here.'

'What is he going to teach us, Miss Elizabeth?'

Memy looked at Charles, and Charles looked at Memy.

And then, suddenly, almost before he knew what he was doing, Charles rose to his feet.

'I'm going to teach you puzzles,' he said. 'The sort of puzzles we like to do at home. It's a kind of lesson, but it's fun.'

The children glanced at one another. This wasn't like any other lesson they'd ever done in school.

'Let's imagine,' Charles began, picking up a rosy apple, 'that this apple is the world. Suppose it's Tuesday morning in London. In another hour it will be Tuesday morning in the west of England. If the whole world were land we might go on tracing Tuesday morning, Tuesday morning, all the way round, till, twenty-four hours later, we got back to London again.'

He looked at Memy. She was enjoying the lesson as much as anyone.

'But we *know*,' continued Charles, 'that twenty-four hours after Tuesday morning, it is Wednesday morning in London. Where, as it makes its way round the earth, does the day change its name?'

'In Australia!' guessed a little boy with red hair, in the front row.

'Africa!' cried a small girl at the back.

'Timbuctoo!' decided a boy in the middle of the class, with no idea where Timbuctoo might be.

And so began a lesson that taught about time and geography, and the people who lived in different countries. (One little girl thought that people must be living upside down if they lived at the bottom of the world.) It was the

most exciting lesson that was ever taught at the village school; and Charles went back to teach there again and again. And often, in their holidays, the children in the village would walk past the rectory garden, and point out the serious young man who sat writing under the big acacia tree. 'That's Mr Charles,' they would say to each other. 'That's Mr Charles, who teaches us!'

*

Charles was interested in schools; when he had been at Rugby he had often shut himself in his room to read the latest instalment of *David Copperfield*. It was the new story by the famous novelist, Mr Dickens, and it used to appear every month in the *Penny Magazine*. Charles shuddered at the very thought of the schoolmaster, Mr Creakle: 'Now, boys, come fresh up to the lessons, I advise you,' Mr Creakle had said, 'for I come fresh up to the punishments.' Charles hated rough masters and bullying boys, and impositions and fagging; he hated the whole way boys behaved to each other. He understood all David Copperfield's loneliness and unhappiness. It was rather like what he felt himself. Dickens understood what it meant to be bullied and oppressed; he defended the weak against the strong. Dickens made you hot with indignation. Charles raged when he read in *Dombey and Son* about Dr Blimber's school, where the little boys 'knew no rest from ghosts of exercises that appeared to them in their dreams.' And what made him angriest of all was *Nicholas Nickleby* and the dreadful school called Dotheboys Hall. The headmaster was a wretched bully called Mr Squeers; he had threatened a poor frail boy and told him he'd flog him within an inch of his life.

'How could Mr Squeers be so cruel?' Charles asked

Memy, one afternoon at Croft. 'No-one could ever be so unkind.

'Papa says that Mr Squeers was a real person,' said Memy, 'and Dotheboys Hall was a real school in Yorkshire.'

'What else did he say?'

'He could say a great deal,' added Mr Dodgson, who happened to enter the drawing-room at this moment.

'Do tell us more, Papa.'

Mr Dodgson sat down in an armchair and lit his pipe.

'It was a dreadful case,' he said. 'And I am sorry to say it happened not so long ago. There was a certain Mr William Shaw, the master of Bowes Academy in Yorkshire. He used to advertise his school in the columns of *The Times*. "No extra charges," he used to say, "and no vacations."

'Do you mean the pupils never had any holidays, Papa?'

'Precisely that,' Mr Dodgson answered. 'And perhaps it was just as well for Mr William Shaw that no fathers used to see their children. If they had, he might have found himself on trial yet again for gross neglect and starvation of his pupils.'

'But no-one found out how dreadful it was?' Memy enquired.

'Alas,' said Mr Dodgson, 'for some years Bowes Academy went on in its wretched way. And then, one day, about ten years ago, a visitor arrived. He said he was looking at the school for the son of a widowed friend. He was in fact that excellent novelist, Mr Charles Dickens. He was going to describe the school in his new novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*. He was horrified by what he saw. When at last he told his tale, Mr Shaw's Academy was finished.'

'I should like to see the school,' Charles said quietly.

A few days later he took a coach across the bleak Yorkshire moors to see the village of Bowes, near Barnard Castle. He had never in his life seen so grim a place. And there was the long, cold-looking house with its straggling outbuildings. He imagined how it must have seemed to Nicholas Nickleby that dismal night, with its dark windows and the wide snow stretching all round. He imagined the bare dirty classroom, and the windows stopped up with paper, the discoloured walls, the old, rickety desks, the pale and haggard boys.

But *Nicholas Nickleby* had done its work. Bowes Academy was nothing, now, but an old, ruined building. No one lived in it except rats and mice.

*

Charles rode back thoughtfully to Croft. He had hardly rung the front door bell before there was a clatter and scamper down the stairs, and four of the younger children rushed to meet him.

‘Tell us a story, please,’ cried Maggie.

‘We’ve been waiting up for you, you’re half-an-hour late,’ continued Will, tugging hard at his sleeve.

‘Charlie is much too tired from his journey to sit around telling stories,’ called Memy in a strict voice, over the banisters. ‘Anyway, you know he’s got to work to go to Oxford.’

‘I can do my mathematics later,’ said Charles, taking off his coat. ‘Give me a minute to wash the dust and dirt off my face, and I will come up to the nursery.’

‘I’ll fetch you a basin of water and some soap this instant,’ said Maggie, bustling off towards the kitchen. ‘Then you can wash your face and hands in the nursery by the fire. That will save us time.’

A few minutes later, Charles was back in the nursery armchair, with an eager sister leaning over each side, and all the other children sitting round on the floor.

‘What kind of a story do want?’ he asked.

‘One about a school. The kind of school you’ve been to see to-day.’

Charles thought for a moment.

‘I don’t know any stories of schools,’ he said, ‘except a little tale about the history book and the slate. It isn’t really very exciting, but it’s got a moral. If you like, I’ve just got time for that.’

Once upon a time, on a desk, there lay a handsome history book and a humble slate. The book was so full of pictures of kings and queens and princes that it almost felt a king itself.

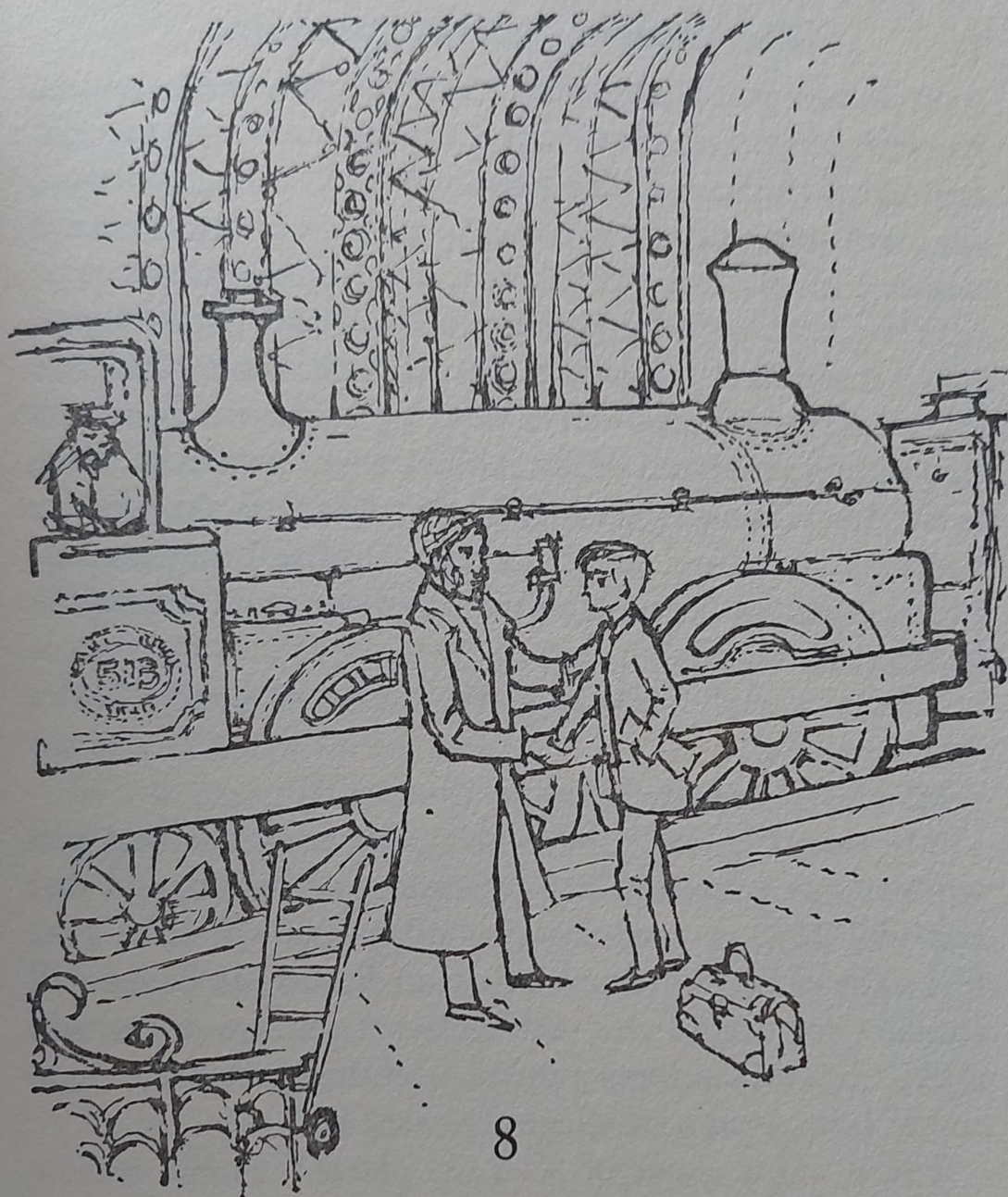
‘Think of the mighty battles and treaties, the conquests and expeditions between my covers,’ it informed the slate. ‘You will find the whole history of England in my pages.’

The slate was silent; the history book decided to be even more impressive.

‘If you want to learn about Alfred the Great, or the Wars of the Roses, or the Spanish Armada, or Queen Elizabeth, you have only to open me,’ it continued. ‘There are a thousand years of history inside me. There’s no more important book in the world.’

While the history book had been busy boasting, the slate had been busy thinking.

‘It is true,’ it replied, ‘that you may contain the past, all the history of England until Queen Victoria came to the Throne. But though I look humble, I am the slate on which child after child will set down all our history to come.’



8

1850: Eighteen Years Old

On 22 May 1850 came the day for which Charles had been preparing for so long: he was to go to Oxford to matriculate, or register, at Christ Church. Mr Dodgson had taken time from his parochial duties to escort his son as far as London; and together they stood on the platform at Paddington Station waiting for the Oxford train to depart. Mr Dodgson looked up at the great span of the station

roof, and then at the bustling crowd on the concourse: the women dressed in close-fitting bonnets and elegant silk crinolines, the men high-hatted and dark-suited, nearly all of them wearing side-whiskers and carefully trimmed moustaches like the Queen's husband, Prince Albert.

'This is an eventful day for both of us,' Mr Dodgson said. 'It seems a long time since I went up to Oxford: indeed it is more than thirty years ago. There was no railway station at Oxford in my student days: I went by coach to the Angel Inn in the High Street.' And then the familiar dreamy look passed across his face. 'I think I may say,' he added, 'that my days as an undergraduate were among the happiest of my life.'

'I hope I shall prove myself worthy of you,' Charles said earnestly.

Mr Dodgson patted him on the arm.

'My dear Charles, I have no doubt whatever that you will conduct yourself like a Christian gentleman, and that you will excel at your work. To-day you will have your first sight of Oxford; I presume your friend Mr Bayne will conduct you round that noble city. To-morrow you will matriculate and become a member of the University. Remember how great a privilege that will be.'

There was a shout of 'Get in, please!' as the station-master walked down the platform; there was a general flurry of crinolines, a general bidding of farewells, a general flutter of scarves and handkerchiefs from the carriage windows. Charles stepped into his compartment: the door was shut, Mr Dodgson waved his tall black hat in salutation; and, snorting like a pre-historic monster come to life, the engine slowly drew out of the station.

*

Charles was never to forget the moment an hour or so

later when, across the fields and marshes, he saw Oxford for the first time. It was like a golden coronet of towers and domes and steeples; and, as the train drew punctually into the new railway station, he heard twelve o'clock, a cascade of music, striking from a multitude of bells. He would have thought himself in a dream, if it had not been for the cheerful voice of his friend Vere Bayne who was waiting on the platform.

'Welcome to Oxford!' cried Vere Bayne. 'Is this your travelling case? We will have it sent to the room I've reserved for you.'

He spoke a few words to the porter, and handed him some money. 'Now, Charles, the carriage is waiting,' he said, 'and we will drive to Christ Church. I've arranged for you to lunch in my rooms.'

In a matter of moments, they were driving over Folly Bridge. On their right glittered the river Thames – 'the Isis, we call it,' said Vere. Pleasure boats of every description, from skiffs to eight-oared cutters, clustered about it like busy dragonflies; and along the further bank were moored the college barges, with their fluttering heraldic flags and their gleaming emblazoned crests.

'There is the House,' said Vere at once.

'The House?'

'Aedes Christi – the House of Christ. It's a religious foundation. Every Oxford man knows Christ Church as The House.'

And there, separated from the river by a broad tree-lined meadow, rose a massive building like a palace. They drove up to the main entrance and climbed out of the carriage. Charles looked up at the great domed tower over the archway.

'That was designed by Sir Christopher Wren,' Vere explained. 'And this,' he added, as they walked under-

neath it, 'is the Great Quadrangle – usually called Tom Quad. Tom, you know, is the name of the bell in the tower.'

Charles gazed at the quad, the wide terrace walk around it, the fountain splashing happily in the middle.

'It is two hundred and sixty three feet square,' said Vere with a smile. 'As a mathematician, you should know. There are the Dean's lodgings, facing us. The Students – we call them Students here, not Fellows – live round this quad. The undergraduates live in the others.'

'Do you mean there are other quads like this?' Charles asked in amazement.

'Not as large as this.' Vere led him round the terrace. 'Round this corner is Peckwater Quad – we call it Peck, of course – and Canterbury Quad. I live in Canterbury.'

THOMAS VERE BAYNE, ESQ., said the inscription, in white letters, over the door.

'This is my sitting-room,' Vere announced. 'I hope you approve of it. Of course I have a bedroom beyond it, too.'

Charles entered a large room flooded with light from the two tall windows. On one side were bookcases crammed with books, right up to the lofty ceiling. On the mantelpiece, over the empty hearth, were Vere's clay pipes, a coloured engraving of Oxford, and an elegant little statuette representing a Greek goddess.

'That is Pallas Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom,' Vere explained. 'She is here to remind me of the learning and wisdom I must acquire. And I must warn you that in Oxford there are many temptations to enjoy oneself – especially in this glorious summer weather.'

'I could spend all day on the river,' said Charles.

'And so could I,' said Vere. 'But I have vowed to show you the beauties of Oxford. We must have some food to sustain us; and I think I hear the sound of Burton's foot-

steps on the stairs. Burton is my scout – or servant – he should be bringing luncheon from the kitchen.'

The door opened to reveal an old man with white hair and apple cheeks; he was followed by a boy who was wearing an apron and carrying a large tray.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' said Burton.

'Good morning, Burton,' said Vere. 'What delicacies have you brought us?'

Burton beckoned the boy in.

'An excellent cold chicken, sir, a veal pie, and some Stilton cheese. And as you have an important guest, I have ventured to bring a bottle of uncommonly good hock.'

'Burton, you are without doubt the best scout in all Oxford. I am very much obliged to you. My friend Mr Dodgson and I will certainly do justice to this feast.'

Two hours later, they set out on their tour of Oxford. They had a brief glimpse of Christ Church Hall; they inspected the lofty college kitchen, and Charles noticed the huge gridiron, supported by four wheels, that had been in use long before kitchen ranges were known; it was so huge, he thought, that it could roast forty legs of mutton at the same time. They passed through the cloisters into Christ Church Meadow, and strolled down the Broad Walk, under the leafy elm trees.

'There is the Botanic Garden,' Vere observed, when they came to the end of the avenue. 'It has an aquarium for aquatic plants, and greenhouses, and a conservatory, and a hot-house, and a lecture-room. . . . But, alas, we have no time to visit it to-day. I must take you to Magdalen College. The Water Walk, and the park, and the deer are something to be seen.'

Charles could never be quite sure whether he preferred Christ Church or Magdalen. Christ Church was a splendid monument to Cardinal Wolsey, who had founded it more

than three centuries earlier; it was a Tudor palace, and it had a fine cathedral inside its boundaries. It boasted Tom Quad, and Great Tom, the bell that struck one hundred and one times every night at ten past nine: once for every student on the foundation. But Magdalen, in its gentle way, was quite as beautiful. Its tower greeted the traveller who drove down the London road, and Charles was speechless with delight when he first saw the Water Walk round the deer park in Magdalen grounds.

'This is usually called Addison's Walk,' Vere explained. 'Joseph Addison, the essayist, found it his favourite walk when he was here.'

'I am not surprised,' answered Charles. 'Look at the red and white hawthorn, and the glowing buttercups in the meadows! They are quite enough to inspire a poet.'

'And the chestnuts are all out,' said Vere, 'you can see their white candles shining. The golden laburnums are out, and the purple lilacs. And can you smell the smell of new-mown grass? Look at those lawns: they're like a green taffeta carpet. And can you hear the rush of the mill waters in the distance?'

'It must have been like this when Addison was here,' said Charles. 'In fact, I don't think Oxford has ever changed. It is still a mediæval city.'

'Perhaps,' said Vere, 'when the railways spread, Oxford may be different. But now it stops where the railway begins. You are perfectly right. It is still like a city of three hundred years ago.'

All that afternoon they wandered round the city of grey stone palaces: Queen's, All Souls', Merton and Trinity. They saw little yellow pebble-dash houses in the poorer streets, they saw strange mediæval cavings and sculptures. They visited the Ashmolean Museum. They saw the watch set in turquoise stones which had belonged to Queen Eliza-

beth, and the watch which had always been worn by Oliver Cromwell. And, looking at the guide, Charles found the most exciting entry of all: 'A head (the only specimen known) of the bird called Dodo.'

'I thought that dodos were extinct,' said Vere.

'So did I,' said Charles. 'I thought they were extinct like the lory. But now at least we know how they look: it says here that Dr Shaw, the famous naturalist, "discovered the head of the Dodo among other preserved parts of birds in the Museum".'

Late that night, he turned out his gas-lamp and fell asleep in the little room in St Aldate's, opposite Christ Church, which Vere had found for him. He had a very curious dream: all the rivers of Oxford had flowed into one big pool, and the Lory and the Dodo were swimming in it.

*

Next morning, punctually, as Great Tom struck eleven, Vere knocked on Charles's door.

'Remember to wear a white bow tie,' he said, 'and your dark suit. I have brought you a cap and gown. This is the morning you matriculate.'

Charles put on the sleeveless black gown, with the broad plaited strip hanging from each shoulder. He put on the black mortar-board with a silk tassel.

'Do all undergraduates dress like this?' he asked.

'No,' Vere explained. 'This is the dress of a commoner - like you and me - a student who lives here at his own expense. If you were a nobleman you would wear a black silk gown with full sleeves and a black velvet cap with a gold tassel. You will soon learn to make the distinctions.'

'What must I do now?' Charles enquired.

'You must go through a few examinations and form-

alities. You must be presented to the Vice-Chancellor, and tell him if you are the son of a nobleman, a baronet, a gentleman, or a plebeian. You must subscribe to the Thirty-nine articles, and show that you believe in the Christian faith. You must pay your matriculation fee, and swear obedience to the university statutes. And now,' said Vere, 'I must introduce you to the Senior Student of Christ Church. He is presenting the candidates from our college.'

Later that morning, the candidates from the nineteen colleges and five halls assembled in the Sheldonian Theatre. Charles looked up at the painted ceiling, the tiers of galleries for the spectators, the semi-circle of seats at one end reserved for doctors and heads of colleges. The great doors of the Theatre opened. A verger entered, bearing a silver rod; he was followed by two esquire bedels carrying gold staves, and two yeomen bedels with staves of silver. Then came the two proctors, the peace officers of the University, wearing black gowns with black velvet facings and large ermine hoods. After them, clad in the black and scarlet robes of a Doctor of Divinity, came the Vice-Chancellor of the University. He seated himself in a special chair in the centre of the semi-circle. The ceremony proceeded just as Vere had explained.

An hour later, Charles had matriculated and found himself once more in the rooms in Canterbury Quad.

*

'I am glad to say we have time for another of Burton's excellent luncheons before you catch your train,' said Vere with a smile. 'Alas, life will not be all dodos and hock when you come into residence.'

'I know there will be a great deal of classics and mathematics,' said Charles.

'And logic,' added Vere, 'and the rudiments of religion. You must know something of the Gospels in the original Greek, and rhetoric, and natural and moral philosophy. I hope you are not beginning to regret it.'

Charles shook his head.

'I have no regrets. I enjoy my work; I shall enjoy it all the more in these surroundings. But I haven't forgotten I still have to go on the river. You and I must take a picnic, one of these afternoons, and have our feast in that little village you mentioned.'

'Godstow?' asked Vere.

'Yes, Godstow.'

'Of course we must visit the famous Trout Inn and sample its wines, my dear Charles. Though I very much doubt if they will excel the wines that Burton gives us.'

They finished some excellent ham and tongue and a dish of strawberries.

Great Tom struck two.

'We must go now,' Vere decided. 'Your travelling case has been taken to the station. I have arranged for the two of us to be punted across the Isis. We'll be within a hundred yards of the station, then. My dear Charles, to think that the Great Western Railroad opened its first connection with Oxford only six years ago! What should we do without a railway now?'

Half an hour later Charles was in the train. As it drew out of Oxford station, he saw once more the coronet of towers and steeples, pale and gold against the bright May sky. There was the tall, slim tower of Magdalen, there were the shorter, broader tower of Merton, the ornate twin towers of All Souls', the graceful spire of St Mary's. And there, more massive than them all, was the great domed tower of Christ Church: Tom Tower, built by Sir Christopher Wren in the seventeenth century, with its deep and

splendid bell, the bell that sounded a summons and curfew to every member of the university.

Charles had spent one day in Oxford. He already knew that in that haunting ancient world he could live the rest of his life. And that was what he wanted to do.

Epilogue

On 24 January 1851, three days before his nineteenth birthday, Charles began his student life at Oxford. It seemed as if his dream was coming true. Only two days later, on 26 January, came the saddest moment in his life. His mother died, quite suddenly, at Croft.

Everyone who knew her had always loved her. She had been so gentle and so kind. For the Dodgson family the loss was terrible. She had been the centre of their lives. Without her, Croft seemed cold and cheerless; without her it was empty. It didn't seem a real home any longer. When Charles stood by the side of his mother's grave in the village churchyard, he felt he could never be happy any more.

The Dodgson family circle had broken. Fanny and Memy were grown-up, and Caroline and Maggie were too old to act in his plays. Little Edwin was only seven, but one day even he would be a man and go into the world. Charles knew his childhood and youth were over. He could not bear to think about the future. He decided that he must keep the clock at yesterday.

He went back to Christ Church; and there he stayed for the rest of his life, until he almost became a part of the college. He took a first class degree in mathematics in 1854, he became a Bachelor of Arts and then a Master of Arts. He became a Student (or Fellow) of Christ Church, a Sen-

ior Student, then Lecturer in Mathematics. He published learned books on logic, algebra and geometry. He justified all the faith that Mr Tate of Richmond and Dr Tait of Rugby had shown in him. By the time that Mr Dodgson – then Canon Dodgson of Ripon – died at Croft in 1868, his eldest son had become a distinguished man.

But, as Canon Dodgson may have expected, Charles was not distinguished for his university work alone. Half his skill lay in mathematics, but half of it still lay in fantasy. Even when he was an Oxford don, he still edited *The Rectory Umbrella* for his family; and year after year, in his college rooms, he still compiled a scrapbook of nonsense called *Mischmasch*. In 1856 he began to write nonsense for a London magazine called *The Train*; and as he could hardly use the name he used for his Oxford work, he made up a nonsense pen-name, Lewis Carroll. He decided to keep his two selves apart. Half of him would be the don; half of him would always be the boy who had told the wonderful tales at Croft. He would make friends with little children, especially little girls who could take the place of Fanny and Memy and Caroline, and enjoy his plays and puzzles and listen to his tales.

The little girl who enjoyed his tales and puzzles most of all was a little girl of ten called Alice Liddell. She was the daughter of Dean Liddell, who was the head of his college. On 4 July 1862, with another Oxford don, Charles took Alice and her sisters for a picnic. It was a cloudless afternoon; they packed a hamper, and rowed up the river Cherwell towards the little village of Godstow. Alice asked for a story; and, at that moment, while the water tinkled from the oars and the summer sun shone through the trees, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson became Lewis Carroll for ever.

He remembered the rabbits in the fields at Croft, wearing white kid gloves as they scurried away; he remembered

the long dark passages in the castle wall at Beaumaris, the underground passages at Richmond that led under the river Swale to the Earl's Orchard on the other side. He told Alice Liddell about another little girl called Alice who had seen a White Rabbit scamper down a rabbit-hole. He told her the tale that became known as *Alice in Wonderland*.

If you read the book carefully yourself, you will recognise many things: the bottle of Croft water that made people change their shape, the Lory and the Dodo, and Christopher the wise Caterpillar. You will recognise the Frog-Footman and the Cheshire Cat, the pig baby, and the Dormouse that kept on dropping off to sleep again. And there are Elsie, Lacie and Tillie and the treacle-wells (which were really Hell Kettles, as you know), and there's the croquet ground (which was really the lawn at Croft Rectory). They are even playing the game of croquet with hedgehogs and flamingoes. And there's a magic mushroom, though this time it doesn't talk; and, goodness, here's the Cheshire Cat again – I mean its head, floating in the air, like the head at Richmond. And there's a gryphon, and it's busy dancing. *Alice in Wonderland* is, in a way, the story of Lewis Carroll.

Three years after he had told it on the river picnic, it was published with beautiful illustrations. It was translated into more than a dozen languages. It was so popular that people wrote music for it and designed special curtain material with pictures of Alice, the White Rabbit and the Dormouse. Everyone was busy quoting the Dodo and the Duchess; and everyone – at least in Oxford – knew that Mr Dodgson was really the same person as Lewis Carroll.

This wasn't surprising; for only an excellent mathematician could work out stories quite as well as that; only the man who wrote books on logic (which is after all, the

art of reasoning) could invent this reasonable nonsense. Soon after *Alice in Wonderland* was published, a clergyman's wife called Mrs Bennie took her children to Whitby for a holiday. One day she found them on the beach; they were too excited to paddle or dig castles or look for shells. They were listening to a man who was telling them a tale about the sea.

'You must be the author of *Alice in Wonderland*,' Mrs Bennie said to him.

'My name is Dodgson,' he replied, 'and *Alice in Wonderland* was written by Lewis Carroll.'

'Then you must have borrowed the name,' answered Mrs Bennie, 'for he is the only man who could tell a story like this.'

After a moment or two he admitted it.

He already had an idea for a sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*; it was another little girl called Alice Raikes who suggested how it should begin. Lewis Carroll gave her an orange and asked her which hand she held it in.

'The right,' said Alice.

He took her to a mirror and asked her which hand she held the orange in now.

'The left,' replied Alice. 'But if I was on the other side of the glass, wouldn't the orange still be in my right hand?'

And this was the real beginning of *Through the Looking-Glass; and What Alice Found There*.

It was published in 1871; it was all worked out like a game of chess, with the characters making moves on the board. And into it Lewis Carroll put still more of the things he remembered. There were the kittens which had played at Daresbury and Croft and in Mrs Rhys's kitchen at Beaumaris; there were the Menai Bridge he had crossed on his way to Anglesey, and the left-hand shoe he had

buried under the floor. There was the railway with its rules (quite as strict as the railway rules he had written out at Croft); there were Hengist and Horsa – though he called them Hatta and Haigha – from Chester. There were hundreds of other things, all fitted together neatly like a jigsaw; you can work out the puzzle for yourselves when you read the book.

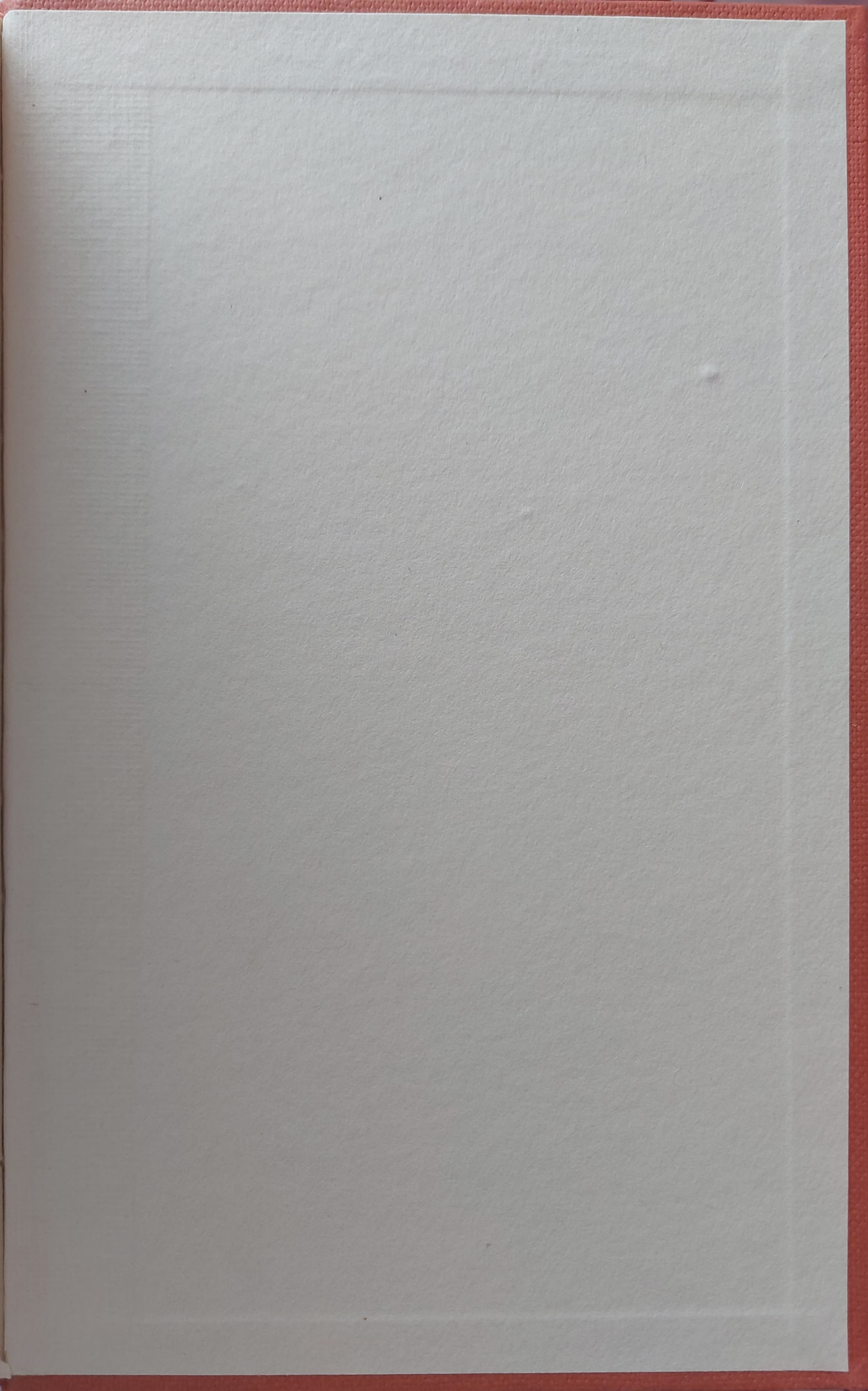
A few years later, Lewis Carroll wrote a poem about a nonsense voyage. It was called *The Hunting of the Snark*. And here, again, you will find bits that remind you of Daresbury, Richmond, Beaumaris and Croft Rectory.

Lewis Carroll was always making friends with little girls; he could never stop telling them tales, and they could never stop listening. He wrote them nonsense letters all about Oxford and wild buffaloes in the park at Magdalen. He had them to tea in his rooms in Tom Quad, at Christ Church, and there never was such a fairy-land. He had the finest collection of musical-boxes anywhere in the world, and a fluttering toy called The Bat which was made of wire and gauze and worked by a piece of twisted elastic. As the fire-glow threw fantastic shadows round the room and all its treasures, you couldn't help imagining you were in Wonderland. He took some of the little girls he knew to Eastbourne in the summer, and they used to have tea in the coastguard's cottage on top of Beachy Head. And as they ate their tea, or sat on the springy turf just outside the cottage, he would tell them story after story, and what he told them was so fantastic, so new and so exciting, that they wished the tales would never end. The little girls grew up and married and had children of their own, but Lewis Carroll never really changed. When his hair went grey, he could still be seen in his famous black frock-coat and black-and-grey cotton gloves, wandering round Oxford, lost in Wonderland.

Years before, when his father died, the family had moved from Croft to Guildford. And there, in a house called 'The Chestnuts,' Lewis Carroll often stayed on his holidays, and he and Fanny and Memy would talk for hours and hours together about the past.

He died at Guildford on 14 January, 1898.

Lewis Carroll never married and had children of his own; he had found it harder and harder to talk to grown-up people. But all of us love nonsense, and seeing reason turned upside down, and words turned back to front and inside out. Deep down, we all love curious creatures like the Cheshire Cat and the Dormouse, and strange adventures, like falling down rabbit-holes. That is why Queen Victoria loved the tale of the White Rabbit and the Mad Hatter quite as much as Alice Liddell. That is why we can read the Alice books in almost every language under the sun, why we read them again and again and always will.



' Famous Childhoods '

THE YOUNG

DICKENS

Patrick Pringle

LIVINGSTONE

EDISON

ELIZABETH FRY

FARADAY

SHAKESPEARE

Rosemary Anne Sisson

JANE AUSTEN

SHAFTESBURY

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Lettice Cooper

VICTORIA

EDGAR ALLAN POE

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Naomi Mitchison

ALFRED THE GREAT

MARIE CURIE

Clare Abrahall

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

ELIZABETH

Jean Plaidy

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS

PAVLOVA

E. M. Almedingen

LEONARDO DA VINCI

DRAKE

Frank Knight

COLUMBUS

GEORGE STEPHENSON

C. Hamilton Ellis

BRÖNTES

Phyllis Bentley

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

James Cadell

MOZART

Alan Jenkins

BADEN-POWELL

Arthur Catherall

SHELLEY

Philip Rush

DAVID

Arthur Groom

HANS ANDERSEN

Reginald Spink

ROBERT BRUCE

Jane Oliver

NELSON

Ronald Syme

NAPOLEON

Leonard Cooper

DAVID GARRICK

Rosemary Weir

WILLIAM BOOTH

Bernard Watson

LOUISA M. ALCOTT

Martha Robinson

LEWIS CARROLL

Joanna Richardson

CICERO

James Barbary

